Notes on the translation

This is a translation of the Russian text of Religion and Socialism by Anatoly Lunacharsky as found here http://lunacharsky.newgod.su/lib/religiya-i-socializm-t-1/ which comes from a scan of a copy found in the Lenin library by Roland Boer

This translation was done by Immanuelle Leonhart using GPT-01. Please use a critical edition or Roland Boer's English translation if it is available.

Preface

I

This work, in its most essential outlines, was conceived about ten years ago, in the author's early youth. The main ideas—about the essence of religion in general, about the meaning and direction of religious development, about the connection between scientific socialism and the cherished aspirations of humanity as expressed in religious myths and dogmas and in the metaphysical systems that supplanted them, about the central place of "labor" in the new worldview—all these ideas took shape early on in the author's mind and, without changing in their substance, only became clearer and more firmly established as he grew more deeply acquainted with the history of religion and philosophy and with scientific socialism.

In 1898, the author delivered in Kiev a paper entitled "Idealism and Marxism," in which he first outlined these ideas. **Berdyaev**, then still very young and not yet as distant from Social Democracy as he is now, heard the report. It turned out that we had been working, essentially, on the same problem—without knowing it, though surely not by mere chance. Yet how different the results were! Although the writer of these lines received a very friendly critique from N. Berdyaev for his first philosophical paper, one of his (the author's) own earliest serious articles, written three years later, was forced—willy-nilly—to be an uncompromising critique of Berdyaev's views, who by that time had become completely "Bulgakov-ized."*

The author's work proceeded in its own way, though it cannot be said to have been sufficiently systematic, since prisons, exile, practical endeavors, and a series of personal circumstances all posed serious obstacles to any thorough systematization.

The initial plan of the work was conceived on a very large scale. It was to be a complete history of religion from a materialist point of view, incorporating European metaphysics, utopian socialism, and, finally, scientific socialism. Materials accumulated, yet new horizons continued to open, while free time grew ever more scarce. Finally, taking advantage of a few months of not entirely voluntary freedom from "day-to-day life," the author decided on a radical revision of the plan and, without striving for completeness, to provide an ideological sketch of his theory, focusing only on the most significant supporting points. Thus, the project was no longer a history of religion but, rather, a more or less in-depth examination of the relationships between

religion and socialism, an attempt to determine the place of socialism among other religious systems.

What guided the author was not only the colossal difficulty of carrying out his original plan, nor merely the understanding that circumstances would not allow two or three uninterrupted years of methodical work necessary to complete it; he also realized that a scholarly work in two or three volumes, laden with a large body of facts, would be largely inaccessible to a wide readership—and would more likely obscure than strengthen the new, vital ideas he wished to express.

Yet in organizing his material so that it could be presented in a small book of about twenty printer's sheets, the author often discarded, with great regret, various interesting constructions, investigations, hypotheses, and generalizations. For this reason, he decided to publish separately, for those readers who might be interested in his ideas, the most significant fragments of the larger work he had once envisioned.

[Translator's note on "Berdyaev, 'обулгаченного' ...":
"Обулгаченного" is a neologism or pun meaning, roughly, "made to follow Bulgakov," referring to the influence of the religious philosopher Sergei Bulgakov on Nikolai Berdyaev.

II

From childhood, the author felt a profound interest in the religious and artistic expressions of the human heart, an interest that could not fail to grow into a major life problem once he experienced his rapturous "conversion to Marxism." Never did he perceive it [Marxism] simply as a "dry" economic theory, as purely objective factual research and nothing more. Of course, the author clearly recognized the presence and importance of those elements in scientific socialism; but above all, scientific socialism was for him a synthetic philosophy, one that harmoniously united ideal and practice, that realistically and revolutionarily crowned the grand, deeply stirring current of thought of Marx's mentors—the great German idealists.

What Hegel and, later, Feuerbach once were to Herzen and his friends—that is what Marx was for our generation. His profound practicality, his objectivity, his iron logic, and his almost invariably deliberately sober, nearly dry language did not obscure for us the warmth and light at the heart of his system.

Another giant of thought, the "master of a leather factory in the Vladimir province," Joseph Dietzgen, responded in a passionate letter to Marx's "revelation": "You have for the first time, in a clear and irrefutable scientific form, expressed that which henceforth shall become the conscious tendency of historical development—namely, the tendency to subject to human consciousness that natural force in the social process of production which, until now, has been*

blind." It was precisely this aspect [of Marxism] that struck and attracted us. And the dizzying vistas revealed to the imagination by the great prophets of humanity's productive forces—from Francis Bacon (Lord Verulam) to Saint-Simon—helped clarify the "aesthetic and religious gravity" of human labor. "Philosophers of the old schools have only interpreted the world; the task of the new philosophy is to transform it." Yet at the same time, the present writer felt that no one had sufficiently emphasized this aesthetic and religious value of the new worldview and of the workers' movement itself. One could well see, moreover, why it had happened that way. Marx and Engels's task was to illuminate reality from the vantage point of necessity—that is, scientific cognition. They rightly regarded evaluation as secondary, perhaps even tertiary.

But our human relationship to the world is complete only when its processes are not merely understood but also evaluated. Man is a being who both knows and evaluates, and only from knowledge and evaluation does action arise. Granting that the task of defining the foundations and character of the new proletarian worldview—and of clarifying its place among other worldviews, past and present—is much less important than the task of substantiating the scientific proletarian worldview, even then we cannot conclude that it is unimportant.

In the author's mind, there began to emerge something like a system of aesthetics, taken in its most general sense—that is, as the science of human evaluations in general. It is fitting to pause on this thought in the present foreword.

Above all, evaluation is a psychological fact. All and every kind of evaluation, from the crudest to the most all-embracing ideal, rests at bottom on the psychological fact of pleasure and repulsion. The organism not only experiences sensations but also perceives them as colored by these two affective qualities, in varying degrees and nuances. The physiological basis for this psychological fact is fairly clear. The author still finds Avenarius's physiological explanation of this coloration (his "theory of the affectional") unshakable. The most primitive fact—the organism's drive to prolong a pleasant sensation, beneficial to it, and to end a harmful one, as an act of self-preservation—is the seed from which has unfolded the entire wealth of feelings, affects, emotions, and strivings. Initially, this unfolding proceeds in a biological (or zoological) direction, but increasingly it takes on a social character. Just as human cognition and labor developed under the direct influence of the cosmic environment and, even more, the social environment, so did human evaluations. And the laws of this development can only be discovered by the same historical–materialist or monistic method.

All that part of aesthetics that examines "evaluation" as a biosociological fact—determining its place among other manifestations of the human species and the individual—may be called "Biological Aesthetics," taking "biology" to include sociology as its more complex form. Yet aesthetics cannot be limited to that. Recall that cognition itself may be the subject of biosociological study—i.e., science may seek to locate and explain the significance of knowledge itself among other manifestations of individual and social life. As a result of such a study of cognition (the new foundations of which were laid especially by Avenarius in his Critique of Pure Experience), one inevitably arrives at a deep conviction regarding the profound relativity of the fruits of cognition. The current state of science, the contemporary worldview, ceases to appear as an exact reflection of matter, of "the world" or "the object" in

the "mind" or "the subject," and becomes but one stage in man's labor-driven development, in his slow, organismically determined attempt to think through, to humanize the external environment. All of the human world is the product of labor; it is the result of social-labor contact between man and the elements in the broadest sense of the term. Thus, what we call "our world" is but a relative equilibrium between the "social brain" and external forces. That creates the possibility—and indeed the necessity—of conceiving other, higher (as well as lower) modes of perceiving and comprehending the world. However, a deep awareness of the relativity of our worldview does not prevent us from treating the data of our science as something inviolable and from using it to construct theories about the past and future of the world and to trace the history of our cognition itself. And this is the only correct approach. We must not lose sight of the relativity of any principles, laws, and even axioms. But as long as, practically speaking, they do not lead to contradictions and cannot be replaced by better ones, we must strive to illuminate the world by their light and, with their help, to expand the boundaries of what is humanly knowable.

The same is true of evaluation. Biological aesthetics cannot but lead us to the conclusion that all and any evaluations are relative. And what appears to us, in conjunction with the new proletarian worldview, as the new proletarian evaluation of the world is, of course, also relative, transient, and, in any case, a purely human subjective form of feeling. But for us, within the confines of our epoch, we can take this evaluation not only as an established fact but, far more joyfully, as the one now becoming established for "tomorrow." This is precisely what makes possible the creation of a "Normative Aesthetics," albeit one that is of course not absolute.

Our normative aesthetics, establishing criteria and norms of evaluation, does not imagine that it is uncovering objective laws of value. Rather, it aims merely to bring order to the existing judgments (notions of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, etc.) as they come to be formed in our own era of transition and struggle between two worlds: the bourgeois–individualist and the proletarian–socialist. Here we must mention only the basic criterion that, according to the author, underlies aesthetics: the concept of the maximum of life, of the greatest possible vital power. The principle of unity in variety—or of as complete a unity as possible with as rich a diversity of elements as possible—expresses essentially the same thing, though as a "harmonious" principle it does not sufficiently stress the dynamic aspect of what is considered positive. Moreover, once one delves into the biological and social core of this ideal (for it is both criterion and ideal), the principle of the maximum of life proves to be highly social in nature and coincides with the principle of the perfection of the species (a principle openly proclaimed by Marx as well). Normative aesthetics systematically arranges all the world's values (those of nature and of life) around this ideal. Biological aesthetics not only clarifies the biological essence of this ideal but also supports it mightily, revealing how it developed, how its embryonic forms appeared in other ideals and criteria, and it shows quite clearly that departures from or contradictions to it, unless they be necessary stages of its own development, are biologically and socioeconomically pathological or regressive. Biological aesthetics shows that the ideal of the maximum of life, the perfection of the human species, the power of the species, the triumph of reason over the elemental (all these phrases name the same essence) is the psychological expression of what is in fact the mightiest progress in

physiological and socioeconomic life; it also demonstrates how and why the ideal, in turn, becomes a force that raises the energy of individual and social development.

We must be content here with these very general outlines. Thus far, the author has been able only to sketch a general survey of positive aesthetics, published in the collection Essays on a Realist Worldview. That survey very much needs additional elaboration.

The reader will understand how timely the aforementioned ideas must have seemed to the author when the newly "idealized" ex-Marxists began their vigorous public activity in the early days. They seemed to stem from the same need. Mr. Berdyaev formulated the question clearly: According to Marx, socialism is a sociological inevitability, but does that imply that it is a good? According to Marx, socialism is the class cause of the proletariat. But does it follow that it is likewise the cause of all humanity, barring the self-interested? In other words, can it not be demonstrated that socialism is at present the highest conceivable social ideal, irrespective of the interests of any particular class and independently of whether or not it is historically inevitable?

Many orthodox Marxists simply did not perceive a question or a problem where Berdyaev saw them. Sometimes they even maintained that an ideal can only be class-based and that demonstrating its unconditional moral stature, its objective advantages, was a fruitless task. For them, two propositions sufficed: socialism benefits the proletariat; socialism will come about according to the laws of capitalist development and decay.

That was a narrow view. Its adherents might say: Whom are you trying to convert with your objective proofs of the greatness of the socialist ideal? Socialism is not a faith hungering for converts outside the proletariat but a purely class-based objective for the proletariat. They might add that allies from among the intelligentsia or the petty bourgeoisie are not only unnecessary but harmful.

I repeat—this is a narrow view. The natural precursor of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the ideological hegemony of the proletariat. One may, if one likes, deny the usefulness of nonproletarian allies joining the Social-Democratic Party, but only a blind man could deny the importance of a broad sympathy for the proletariat and its banner among all advanced minds and among all those deprived of property. By now it is perfectly clear: against everyone, the proletariat cannot seize—and retain—the dictatorship. Hence, the ideological propaganda of socialism is important. And proving the objective superiority of the socialist ideal (not only for wage workers but for every thinking and feeling person who has not been corrupted by class egoism or prejudice) is a direct path to winning sympathy, often a far more proper route that leads to more lasting results than the parliamentary "services" rendered by Social Democracy to various nonproletarian groups in specific cases.

Moreover, the proletariat's fighting capacity is heightened when it sees its cause validated by the light of science and exalted by the light of ideals.

But Mr. Berdyaev set about solving the problem in the most unfortunate way.

He harshly attacked the Russian school of "subjectivists" in order to separate himself from them. For the subjectivists, the subjective human ideal—or the ideal developed by rational, critical individuals—was itself an autonomous and powerful force, capable of competing with any "objective" laws of history. Historical fate was reduced almost to nothing, while the conscious will of active groups was raised to the status of arbiter of destinies. Their teaching was erroneous, their viewpoint superficial. Mr. Berdyaev criticized them, pointing to the insignificance of subjective ideals in the face of reality. No, he does not wish to base his notion of the good or ground his values on the shaky supports of personal or group predilections and aversions. The ideals created by people are merely the desires of various groups, and battles are decided not by the beauty of the banners but by the number and social weight of the combatants. But above the struggle of men and of their group and class ideals, so he claims, shine the eternal stars of objective, binding values. These moral truths were not known and evident from the beginning, any more than the a priori laws of logic; but like those laws, they are not invented but discovered, and like them, they are formally binding for moral thought, feeling, and behavior. It was only natural that Mr. Berdyaev, having seized in his first book upon the Kantian notion of objectivity to extricate himself from the "quagmire" of the humanly relative, would, like a stone rolling downhill, go bouncing from bump to bump until he arrived at outright mysticism and belief in a personal God—a magnificent, reliable guardian and source of truth, above all moral truth.

The subjectivists were mistaken when they opposed heroes to the masses, ideas-as-forces to the blind elements. But it would not have been so difficult to correct their error. However it may be, man is himself the maker of his own history, the subjectivists said—and that is true. But man makes his history in struggle with nature, first of all blindly and unconsciously; next, splintered into hostile nations, classes, etc.; and only then, gradually, does the social process become ever more conscious. Even so, it remains far indeed from the point where consciousness might have not merely a decisive but even a strongly influential role. And so it will remain until classes are abolished. Even in the proletarian struggle, consciousness plays the modest part of a midwife at a birth—it eases that which is happening without it, something that in its essence cannot be altered. Marxism foresees an era of the triumph of reason, but for capitalist society it demonstrates beyond doubt how human beings are subject to the objective laws of economic development which, fortunately, lead to the threshold of a new life, the kingdom of freedom.

In the course of this struggle—its forms dictated by life—people create ideals, which are the reflection of their social position in a society not created by them but imposed upon them by all of previous history. Those ideals express the desires of peoples, groups, and classes; they are rooted in the social position of those who hold them, in the social ills they suffer. But classes may occupy different positions in society—they may be progressive or stagnant; i.e., their interests may coincide or fail to coincide with the progress of technology and the upheavals that such progress must bring about. Similarly, entire societies may experience decline, stagnation, or development—even a stormy development of technology. It is in this objective fact, so to speak in society's physiology—its progress or regress in technology, its economic development or disintegration, its approach to mastery over nature or its retreat from it—that the Marxist sees the objective criterion for evaluating ideals. For the economic materialist, a

priori the highest ideal must be that of the most advanced class in a possibly rapidly developing society. Or: the most advanced class in an economically flourishing society is the bearer of the liveliest, strongest, and most luminous life-ideal—or it must become so, for "being determines consciousness."

Such a class, because the future belongs to it, is not interested in self-deception or in deceiving others; it can afford to look reality in the face. Hence its ideal will be the most scientific or the closest to reality: it will be a foreshadowing of society's actual development. And insofar as this is the case, it will, naturally, be able to attract the sympathy and support of all that is alive, all that is vigorous, all that is discontented with the present, of all who can thrive only by destroying the framework constricting humanity's developing powers. Thus, an ideal can demonstrate its beauty and vitality, its capacity to triumph, only by referring to those objective forces of which it is the reflection—to its physiological, i.e. socio-economic, underpinnings.

The reader can already see here the incomparable harmony of scientific socialism, which, as both science and ideal, is carved from a single block. The socialist ideal and socialist science buttress each other like two halves of a magnificent arch.

Mr. Berdyaev brushed this path aside. He refused to translate the "subjective" language of ideals into the objective language of facts. His metaphysical objectivity was far worse than the eclectic subjectivism of the Populists; it poured water on the mill of those who strove to tear Marxism apart—to extract from it an ideal and send it off to the heavens, leaving the earth to the crawling realism of reformism.

In a series of articles later included in the collection Polemic and Critical Sketches [Essays], the present writer combated just such a tendency. But in them, there was only the occasional opportunity to articulate anything positive. Meanwhile, the idealist heresy, which gradually ended up leading Marxism's former defenders completely away from Marxism, its relative success, and the confusion it sowed in many minds, convinced the author more than ever of the need to reveal in a special work the great ideal treasures concealed within Marxism—treasures before which all the enthusiastic and "loftily scientific" contrivances of the idealists pale. In essence, those contrivances are nothing but the excavations of metaphysical and religious graves. Meanwhile, scientific socialism has taken up within itself all that is alive and beautiful which once animated those ancient corpses they [the idealists] now disturb.

Thus the importance and timeliness of the planned Aesthetics as the Science of Evaluations grew in the author's view. Yet its most important section, both preliminary and culminating, is naturally a philosophical history of religion, including the great religious-philosophical systems of the modern era and even scientific socialism itself.

The history of world-evaluations coincides in the main with the history of religions and religious-philosophical systems. That is why such a work serves as a preliminary to aesthetics. It develops what is perhaps the most important part of "Biosociological Aesthetics." At the same time, however, placing scientific socialism in a definite connection with the history of human religiosity leads to the most significant conclusion of the entire work.

The author has not given up the idea of elaborating the entire project of Aesthetics as the Science of Evaluations, but for now, the form he has given to the present work seems the most suitable to him.

*Scientific socialism in Russia faces an ideological struggle, as the Social-Democratic Party does—a political and economic struggle. And the issue concerns not only extending its influence but also self-defense. If the idealism of the Kadets** does not catch on with the proletariat, the same cannot be said about various forms of Christian socialism. For the time being, the danger of its attacks seems negligible, but I think the time has come to prepare weapons against it, since by every indication, once the revolution's further victories come, all sorts of reformists and gradualists (on the bourgeois side, of course) will seize upon it, and they will find allies in those foggy enthusiasts who have not yet cast off the "swaddling clothes" of faith, and above all among the prejudices of the darker strata of the proletariat itself, especially in rural areas. In my book, therefore, I pay particular attention to Christianity. Its origins, its essence, and the critique of its spirit in all its transformations occupy, perhaps, more space than a regard for economy of text might otherwise have allowed under different circumstances.*

Such are the preliminary remarks I felt I needed to make.

Florence. May 1, 1907.

Translator's Notes

"Master of a leather factory in the Vladimir province" – This is a reference to Joseph Dietzgen's background as a tanner by trade.

Kadets – Short for the Constitutional Democratic Party (Konstitutional-Demokraticheskaya Partiya) in early 20th-century Russia, also known as the "Cadet Party" in some English-language sources.

1) Difficulty of definition

When it comes to so extremely complex a phenomenon as religion, providing a definition becomes a rather conditional affair. A definition that would encompass every facet of so varied and ever-shifting a stream of feelings, thoughts, and actions would itself be complex. We can only require of it that it isolate what is most essential and characteristic in religion. Here, however, there is almost arbitrary freedom. The very purpose behind the search for a definition comes into play, highlighting one aspect or another. An Enlightenment thinker battling harmful forms of religion—once they have become a reactionary force—happily makes precisely that feature of religion the essential one whose harm or decrepitude is easily demonstrated. He often seizes on religion's external attributes—its mythology, its dogmas—declares them to be the soul of all religion, proves their contradiction to science and progress, and thereupon condemns "religion in general" to inevitable death.

Someone more attuned to historical continuity, who thinks and feels less in a purely rationalistic way, will tend to believe that the essence of religion can and must outlive its forms. To him it seems strange and implausible that an entire domain of the spirit might wither away, that the system of feelings and thoughts which served as the axis of a people's inner life might vanish without a trace. He looks beyond the forms of religion to the needs that gave rise to it, and asks himself whether these needs have been satisfied—or whether people have renounced and condemned them so that they have atrophied. And if not, then how are these needs being met now? Moreover, does what meets them today not share deep similarities with the old forms of religion, even while fundamentally differing in form? Such a researcher will want, in his definition of religion, to capture those traits that lie at the very core of its spirit, namely its relationship to the fundamental human needs and demands. Of course, in so doing, a question arises: even if a new system satisfies the same demands and is thus connected with religion, can we keep the old name for it when we admit a basic difference of form? Pantheism is of course still a religion, but can one call *the religion of humanity*—the vision Comte dreamed of—religion?

I would say that here, too, it all boils down to where we place the emphasis—on the form in which religion responded, or on the needs that it responded to.

But there is more. Even among the advocates of what I would call a *biopsychological* definition of religion (as opposed to a rationalistic one), there can be a fundamental divergence of opinion. For to the question, "Which basic demands of the human spirit did religion fulfill?" different answers may be given. For some, who are closer to rationalism, these demands boil down to the drive to penetrate the "mysteries of the world." They will thus see any metaphysics as a continuation or new phase of religion and will declare metaphysics to be immortal. Others, closer to economism, voluntarism, or biologism, will see the essence of these demands in questions of happiness, justice, perfection, power, immortality. They will regard as a new phase of religion this new, deeply realistic and enthusiastic idealism.

All these disagreements will become clearer if we take at least a cursory look at Social Democratic literature on the subject, making no claim whatsoever to a full survey.

2) Social Democrats on the Essence of Religion

Plekhanov, Engels, Pannekoek.

Not long ago, in response to a *Mercure de France* survey on the future of religion, Comrade G. V. Plekhanov gave a very clear and precise definition of religion in the rationalist sense—that is, considering religion from the perspective of its form (the manner in which it was expressed), and mainly as a form of understanding the world. Here is the respected comrade's complete response to the survey question, phrased thus: "Is religion going through an evolution, or is it dying out?"

> "Permit me, in answering your question, to take a social-evolutionary viewpoint and to rephrase it as follows: Is the disappearance of religion not the natural end of its evolution? To answer this, let us first be clear about what that evolution has been up to now.
>
> "But first of all, what is religion? If we employ the 'minimal' definition that Edward B. Tylor gives, we shall say that religion is belief in spiritual beings who dwell alongside the bodies and processes of nature. This belief is a necessary element in any religion and at the same time serves to explain all phenomena of nature. At a more advanced stage of social evolution, a new element is added to this primitive core: a moral element. Over time, the two elements become ever more closely intertwined. Finally, we arrive at what I would call the *'maximal'* definition of religion: belief in spiritual beings that is linked with morality and serves as its sanction. That is why many have concluded that the essence of religion lies in morality. But we are far from the end of this evolution. The relationship between morality and religion, which once seemed inseparable, must vanish thanks to the progress of the human mind.
>
> "A scientific explanation of phenomena can only be materialist. The intervention of spiritual beings, which in the eyes of the savage explains everything, explains nothing in the eyes of someone like Berthelot. For every civilized person, the significance of such an explanation diminishes in proportion to how fully he adopts the results of scientific work.

> "If many people still believe in the existence of spirits and supernatural beings, that is because, for a variety of reasons, they have not been able to overcome the obstacles on the path to a scientific outlook.
>
> "When these obstacles are removed (and everything suggests that social evolution will accomplish this), every trace of a supranaturalistic conception will disappear, and morality will be forced to occupy its independent place.
>
> "Religion in the maximal sense is on its way out. As for religious feeling, it is obvious that it will disappear along with the religious idea. But feelings are of course more conservative than ideas. There will be various vestiges, there will appear bastardized conceptions of the world—half materialist, half spiritualist—but in their turn these too are condemned to extinction, especially once certain institutions that religion supposedly sanctioned have vanished. Humanity's progress carries with it the death sentence for both the religious idea and religious feeling. Only the timid or the self-interested express fear for the fate of morality. Morality is capable of independent existence. Even now, belief in spiritual beings is far from being morality's main support; on the contrary, the religious beliefs of the civilized nations of our time lag behind their moral development.
>
> "'If people were not better than their religions,' Clifford rightly observes, 'the world would be a hell.'"

Thus, according to Plekhanov, religion is, above all, a particular—that is, animist—explanation of phenomena. Later, the "spirits" were summoned to safeguard moral laws, and their will was viewed as the source of these laws. Now, phenomena have come to be explained in a different way; no spirits are found to be present, and "we no longer need that hypothesis for cognitive purposes," as Laplace said of God, and so morality, too, must give up any supernatural sanction and seek a natural one instead. Supernaturalism is driven out by scientific realism, and there is no longer any room for religion.

Engels stood on the same ground as Plekhanov, as is evident from the following statement, for example:

> "Regarding the great majority of German Social Democrats, it may be said that for them atheism is an already surmounted stage: the word, which has a purely negative meaning, is not applicable to them since they are no longer theoretical adversaries of religion but only practical ones. They have parted ways with the idea of God; they live and think in a real, concrete world, and therefore are materialists."[1]

Here religion is equated with the latest form of animism—monotheism—and Social Democracy is declared a "practical opponent of religion."

In a recent pamphlet, Anton Pannekoek, with characteristic precision, explained what should be meant by this practical struggle against religion. At the same time, he emphatically insists on that same narrow definition of religion: religion is belief in the supernatural:

> "We mean by religion what has always been its essential hallmark: belief in a supernatural being that allegedly governs the world and directs the destinies of men."

And further:

> "A profound contradiction emerges between our view and the religious view, since we regard those phenomena that the religious person sees as supernatural as natural in character, and we explain them by natural causes."

Finally:

> "If we wished to apply the name 'religion' to everything that might otherwise be called virtue, morality, and idealism, we should create confusion in our concepts instead of clarity.
>
> "In our investigation, we are not dealing with the future of morality or of the various virtues—for on that point there is no difference of view among socialists—but with the future of belief in God."[2]

Certainly, to offhandedly assert that "virtue, morality, and idealism" are the same as "religion" does indeed sow confusion; yet clarity and simplicity do not always provide a conclusive argument in favor of one definition or another. How much simpler, for instance, than making a strict distinction between money and commodities! Then suddenly Marx introduces "confusion" by asserting that money is also a commodity, a statement that leads him into discussions he himself called "exceedingly difficult." Of course, in everyday speech "religion" is taken to mean belief in God, so it is most convenient, in practice, to use the term exactly that way. But it is almost always true that commonly accepted definitions are superficial.

We shall return later to a critique of the rationalist definition of religion, as most fully expressed by Comrade Plekhanov. For now, let us move on to other types of definition.

Stampfer. Vanderveld.

A revisionist, Stampfer, occupies an original position on this question. For him, the essential hallmark of religion is dogmatism:

> "The essence of philosophy is freedom; the essence of religion is the absence of freedom. Religion rests on dogmas, while philosophy rests on conclusions. Anyone who wants to prove the truth of religion by means of philosophical investigation, in

> effect, acts contrary to the spirit of religion, which imagines itself superior to all human inquiry."[1]
>
> "In the struggle over worldviews, the two poles, the two extreme points, are not 'religiosity' on the one hand and 'atheism,' or even 'materialism,' on the other, but rather positive religion and the critical activity of the human mind."

Developing this idea further, our author arrives at statements such as:

> "No one—and least of all a Social Democrat!(?)—will deny the validity of such notions as reason, totality, laws, cause, purpose, perfection, justice, and so on. And whether we call these concepts 'God' or something else is merely a question of terminology."[2]

According to Stampfer, the theological systems of antiquity—presumably including those of Pythagoras, Plato, and so forth—have nothing to do with religion. Nor, in his view, were Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, or Schiller in any sense religious, because none of them taught dogmatically. Instead, materialism and atheism turn out to be… practically religion themselves. Indeed, this is what we read about materialism in Stampfer:

> "Social Democracy is in no way bound to the materialist worldview. This worldview denies not only revealed religion, but also philosophy, whose efforts it considers fruitless, altogether forgetting that its own fundamental concepts, 'force' and 'matter,' are also philosophical abstractions. The fact that we think does not exempt us from the labor of studying the laws of that thinking. Insofar as materialism rejects such study and tries, in its own way, to seal up the world with planks, it is very close to the revealed religions."

Thus, Stampfer stands everything on its head. By focusing so strongly on the external sign of dogmatism, he is willing to regard all sorts of philosophical systems that invoke the notion of God-as-goal or God-as-justice as akin to the scientific-socialist worldview, yet at the same time he excommunicates the materialists. Meanwhile, Engels says of those same materialists:

> "Care should be taken to see that large numbers of the brilliant French materialist literature of the eighteenth century are circulated among the workers—that literature which in form and content remains to this day the greatest creation of the French genius, which, in terms of its content, taking into account the state of science at the time, still stands on an unparalleled height; and which in form likewise remains unequaled."

Vandervelde, too, takes up a particular position, one that is friendly to metaphysical idealism. True, he does not commit the crude errors of Stampfer; on the contrary, for him, the essence of religion lies precisely in what Stampfer regards as the negation of religion—namely, in the free exploration of the "mystery."

> "Only someone who does not understand the relative nature of science and its powerlessness to reveal the essence of things can harbor the illusion that the progress of scientific knowledge will put an end to philosophical ignorance," says Vandervelde.[3]

Vandervelde calls this incursion into the unknown "religion" or "religious philosophy," which thus become eternal.

> "Doubtless, there are people utterly foreign to mysticism and convinced of the futility of speculations about a transcendent world who will be satisfied with the mere happiness of living and will await death without fear and without hope. Others, by contrast, will be unable to overcome their need for constructing hypotheses, and in accordance with the bent of their minds, they will join one or another of the doctrines that have divided humanity ever since religious and philosophical systems came into being.
>
> "But they will all agree that it is impossible to give their beliefs a scientific or historical foundation; all will recognize the inherently subjective character of these hypotheses, and consequently they will relinquish any claim to impose them on others as definite, absolute truths."[4]

Such, in essence, is Vandervelde's opinion. "Some will believe in the existence of God and in an afterlife, others will not," he says.

His definition is deeper than Plekhanov's—less narrow, less rationalistic; yet truth is mixed with error in it. Vandervelde senses that the core of religion is not at all a "way of explaining phenomena," but rather a response to the question of man's place in the world—a response not theoretical but practical. Instead of showing that, even amid the most dazzling triumphs of science and in the clearest comprehension of the universe, a place remains for religion, he bases his reasoning on science's inability to reveal the essence of things. In other words, he simply starts *a priori* from a metaphysical conception of essences hidden behind phenomena, and from that premise, he turns religion into a hypothesis about such essences. That is pure Kantianism. Kant teaches that the *Ding an sich*—the essence of things—is unknowable to pure reason, yet practical reason urgently wants, even needs, that essence to be consoling and to offer a moral explanation for the brute immorality of phenomena. We are therefore allowed to postulate various types of grace in that place "behind appearances," empty of knowledge, where there are no facts resistant to our "postulates."

Indeed, the demands of "practical reason"—that is, the human longing for happiness—cannot be declared nonexistent or trivial, nor can they be settled by science *as such*. But to conclude from this that they will always be satisfied by fables that resist refutation only because they lie beyond the reach of the senses is to hand humanity a certificate of spiritual poverty. In that case, we find ourselves nearer to Comrade Plekhanov's view. We differ from him chiefly on a matter of terminology. Accepting his definition, we should have to accept all his conclusions, and we do so "with both hands." Yet even if we were to adopt Vandervelde's terminology—which, in our view, is tangled and imprecise—we would still firmly reject his conclusions. He fails entirely to recognize that great liberation from the transcendent which is taking place despite the efforts of

both refined and crude bourgeois reactionaries—something Comrade Plekhanov sees so clearly. Vandervelde's illustrious compatriot, the poet Verhaeren, says:

> "The gods were the humanization of nature, and it was necessary. If the gods are now leaving, if they are dying, it is a sign that they are no longer needed."

Comrade Plekhanov tells us, "Yes, the gods are no longer needed, because Berthelot does not need them in his laboratory." "Excellent," Vandervelde might reply, "but are they just as needless for someone who has lost a loved one—for the grieving, for the dying, for the person who hears the dead cold of cosmic space in which our planetary system is slowly cooling?" One who can rise above these questions—who can overcome them—has religion. One who ignores them and thus does not need religion is a narrow egoist, a nihilist in the worst sense of the term. But what about one who can rise above these questions *without* the idea of God?—I would say that he possesses a religion without God. To demonstrate that this is possible for modern man is to finish off God. As for the word *religion* itself, it ceases to matter so much. Though I think that despite the fact that, as Dietzgen says, it has been "debased by priests," we ought not to fear it fetishistically, and it is not so easy to replace it, as we shall see.

Ludwig Feuerbach.

Ludwig Feuerbach, of course, did not belong to the Social Democratic camp. He was a precursor to Marx and Engels—or perhaps merely a transitional link leading from philosophical idealism toward them, assisting in purging philosophy of its fundamental error. The vast majority of Social Democrats limit themselves to paying tribute only to his negative achievements. Engels's critique contributed greatly to this: in showing the colossal steps Marx's philosophical thought took beyond, and away from, Feuerbach's still-immature position, he incisively exposed all the shortcomings of the author of *The Essence of Christianity*, leaving him only one historical merit—that he provided the impetus for the final formation of dialectical materialism.

Hence the philosopher, whom the German bourgeois academic world, incensed by his boldness, spitefully hushed up, found in Social Democratic circles only a purely formal recognition of his role as a transitional figure. Meanwhile, in one particular area—*the critical philosophy of religion*—this man was incomparably greater than those who know him only through Friedrich Engels's brilliant monograph might guess. If many specific points in his critique have since been surpassed by scholarship—not so much refuted as *reinforced*—the general spirit of his critique remains striking in its depth. Economic materialism can add a great deal to his critique, but only *add*; the most important part was already accomplished by him. And the customary approach of Social Democratic writers to religious issues often represents a step *backwards*: from Feuerbach's critical stance to the frequently shallow Enlightenment-minded materialism of the eighteenth century. Whatever Engels may have said about the depth and brilliance of the ideas of those materialists—no matter how vast their historical achievements, even in humanity's

religious development—their standpoint vis-à-vis religion was nonetheless superficial. This superficiality is evident in both Voltaire and Diderot with his friends.

That is why I consider it more than justified to refer to Feuerbach here. I believe that *no* materialist ever dealt such a shattering blow to religion—both to positive religion in general and to any belief in God, an afterworld, or the supersensible—as Ludwig Feuerbach. *Philosophically*, the religion of God was finished off by Feuerbach. And the reason is that he did not batter it with a battering ram, or with cold mockery, or with criticism of its outdated aspects and ridiculous absurdities—he demolished it from within, by penetrating to its very core. This man truly grasped the essence of religion. I cannot strongly enough recommend, to all who are interested in our question, a thorough reading of *The Essence of Christianity*, which has now appeared in a Russian translation.[1]

Right in the opening pages of the book, we encounter a categorical assertion:

> "My book does bear a negative character, but please note: it only denies the non-human element in religion, while it acknowledges and affirms the human aspect."

And a few pages later:

> "The charge that my work treats religion as nonsense or illusion would only be valid if what I reduce religion to—what is deemed its genuine object and content, namely *Man*, anthropology—were itself nothing, nonsense, or illusion. But I am far from assigning anthropology a negligible or even secondary status such as occurs whenever theology is set up as something higher than it. On the contrary: I *lower* theology to anthropology and thus *raise anthropology to the level of theology*."[2]

From the standpoint of religious philosophy, I would say that Marx brilliantly continued this task of "raising anthropology to the level of theology," i.e. he definitively aided the consciousness of *Man* to become a human religion. Let us listen further to Feuerbach:

> "The new philosophy contains the essence of religion within itself; *it, in itself, as philosophy, is religion*."

Feuerbach nowhere provides a perfectly satisfactory definition of *religion* per se, but the reader will immediately perceive the vast difference between him and the rationalist, Enlightenment-oriented Social Democrats after reading lines such as these:

> "Religion is the solemn revelation of the treasures hidden within man, the confession of his inner thoughts, the open avowal of the secrets of his love."

Here Feuerbach has grasped religion at its very heart, unlike Comrade Plekhanov, who grasps only its clothing. Feuerbach develops his view of religion in the following way:

> "The historical progress in religion consists precisely in this: what was once *objective* in earlier religions later becomes *subjective*. That is, what was once seen

> as God, and worshiped as such, is now recognized as human. In all religions, man worships his own essence. He externalized himself, yet did not regard this externalized object as his own essence. A later religion makes precisely this step, and the entire progress of religion therefore comes down to a deeper form of self-knowledge."[3]

Even if this definition of humanity's religious development is not complete, it is essentially correct. The quotes given here are enough to demonstrate the philosophical depth of Feuerbach—compared, at least, with the scholarly superficiality of Tylor, whose definition Comrade Plekhanov borrowed (a definition current among both bourgeois and Social Democratic freethinking publicists).

Joseph Dietzgen.

The great philosopher of Social Democracy—whose name as a philosopher is gradually finding its place alongside Engels's—is Joseph Dietzgen. He inclined toward Feuerbach's point of view. His brochure *Religion of Social Democracy*, a text rich in content, contains some wonderful lines:

> "Dear fellow citizens! Within the ideas of Social Democracy there lies a new religion, which, by contrast with everything that currently exists, seeks to be embraced not just by the heart but also by the mind. Unlike other, more commonplace objects of intellectual work, Social Democracy is a special religion because it is a revelation of the human heart. Properly speaking, the purpose of religion is to ease the weary human heart from the sorrows of earthly life. Up to now, however, it has pursued that aim only by an idealist path, resorting to dreams, invoking an unseen God, and promising an afterlife. Yet the true Gospel here and now at last promises to transform, in the most real, actual, and tangible way, our vale of tears and anguish."[1]

What a categorical and splendid statement, one that we gladly endorse.

But Dietzgen goes further. With no less force, he highlights the radical transformation within religious consciousness, the fundamental difference of the new religion:

> "If religion amounts to faith in non-earthly and super-earthly material beings and forces—if it amounts to reliance on gods and spirits—then in that case democracy has no religion at all. In democracy's place stands the awareness of the individual's powerlessness, of his need for social organization in order to achieve

> self-improvement, and of his subordination to that organization on this account. Civilized human society is the higher being in which we believe; we stake our hopes on the social-democratic order. Only this order realizes the love that the religious fantasists have hitherto merely dreamed of. Let people who remain obstinate in superstition and limited in outlook, who lack faith in the democratic development of society, transfer their hopes and their love to 'the other world.'"[2]

No one could express better the fundamental idea that we are trying to develop and prove—specifically as regards scientific socialism. Hence, Dietzgen would concur with Plekhanov's conclusions about the complete death of religion if he accepted Plekhanov's definition. But evidently, he has his doubts about that definition's validity. On the contrary, he is inclined to see the heart of the matter in "awareness of the individual's powerlessness," in belief in a higher principle (for a Social Democrat, that principle is "social organization"), in hope and in love. Dietzgen regards these elements as inherent in the teaching of Social Democracy.

However, it is as though Dietzgen wondered if he had gone too far. As though to please his militant Enlightenment-minded comrades, he softened his stance, thus, understandably, falling into contradictions.

> "In the mindless clamor for the universality, the eternalness, and the inevitability of religion, there is something complete. A simple negation of religion would be mere Russian nihilism—excluded, with full justification, from the international [discourse]. We reject such senseless denial; the 'Kulturkämpfers' make us laugh, since we ourselves intend to fight for the achievements of culture."

Here he sharply criticizes the pure negationists, but then he lashes out even more fiercely in another direction:

> "We acknowledge that man is an inborn systematizer," he says. "Slave-like mediocrities and fools are perhaps the very people who burden us with religion."

That is strongly put. Since Dietzgen begins his lecture with, "Dear fellow citizens, within the ideas of Social Democracy there lies a new religion," a superficial reader might well ask, "So who, then, are you?" But Dietzgen has in mind, when he speaks of people who "burden us with religion," those who—like, for example, Mr. Bulgakov—try to prove that scientific socialism contains superstition and metaphysics, meaning people who wish to impose old forms of religion and take advantage of the essential biological similarity between older faiths and scientific socialism. This idea of Dietzgen's is entirely clear from what follows:

> "We reject the word *religion* not because we deny all common ground or kinship between religious and social-democratic worldviews, but in order to emphasize the difference, to sever ourselves not only in name but in actual substance from the object that has been debased by priests."

It is noteworthy that in this fit of *libre-penseur*-style remorse, Dietzgen still firmly maintains the idea of a kinship between the religious worldview and the social-democratic worldview. Beyond

that point, however, logic deserts him. Indeed, to refuse the word "religion" is to free oneself only in "name" and "externally." One can recognize a debased word and fill it with new substance. Has not the word "ideal" been debased?—even the word "matter," the word "socialism"? Words remain pure in pure mouths, and Social Democracy would only benefit by saying: *Yes, I am a new, great, religious force. I bring with me a religion that replaces all earlier ones, embracing them in its highest potential form.*

Having begun with a bold assertion, Dietzgen in his later lectures seems to have been frightened by his own audacity, to the detriment of the clarity of his conception.

At first, the cognitive task is treated as a special, partial task—one that does not exhaust religion. Religion is "not only" the idea of deliverance from sorrow, not only the expression of practical need, but also the aspiration to understand the world, to systematize one's experience. But in the second part of Dietzgen's work, that second (secondary and subordinate) task drives out all memory of the first, making a purely rationalistic formula suddenly possible: "Having a religion means having a scientific system."

In the second lecture, Dietzgen sums up the idea of his first lecture this way:

> "In the social-democratic movement, we found a new form of religion insofar as this movement pursues a goal analogous to that of religion: to free the human race from the poverty beneath which it, powerless, commenced its struggle for existence in this world of vicissitudes."

But he begins the sixth chapter of his book as follows:

> "Our last lecture was dedicated to the following thesis: 'Man must have a system.' For his intellectual need lies in discovering a starting point from which to view the world. In order not to be lost in the chaotic variety of things, man, in systematizing even the stars in the sky and the world around him, divides everything into domains, categories, classes, kinds, families, individuals. In short, he assigns various names to the various phenomena. To have the capacity to orient oneself in everything—to be able to fit everything into a specific rubric—is what we call having a 'system.'"

And since, according to Dietzgen, having a system *means* having a religion, we have calmly arrived in the realm of pure rationalism. Religion is once more seen, as it is by Plekhanov, as a substitute for science, and naturally it is replaced by real science. But how did it happen that Dietzgen forgot those profound definitions of religion from which he started? The explanation lies in the following sentence, which bridges his first tendency and the second:

> "I called religion 'practical wisdom' because it not only promises (through the mediation of powerful gods, prayers, and lamentations) to liberate us from worldly sorrow and the misfortunes of nature, but also lends systematic precision to our thinking. The universal significance of religion for uncultured peoples rests on the universal human need for a systematic worldview. We possess a practical need—to

> rule over earthly objects—and likewise a creative need—to unite them as a whole. We strive to know the beginning and the end of the world around us."

This comparison finally clarifies Dietzgen's thought for us: As *the reflection in an individual's mind, feelings, and activity* of the grand process of humanity's liberation, *scientific socialism* is a new and supreme form of religion; as *an account of the world,* as *a science,* scientific socialism has nothing in common with any previous form of religion. That, in my opinion, is the precise way to express Dietzgen's thinking, which—unfortunately—comes across so inconsistently in his lectures.[3]

Every religion takes in both science—satisfying the intellect—and aesthetics together with ethics, fulfilling the needs of the emotions, fears, and hopes, and influencing people's actions. It is not merely a worldview, not simply a system of knowledge; rather, it is an immense attitude or disposition, infinitely complex in its elements and encompassing almost all of the individual's relations to the environment. Social Democracy too is far from being a mere system of knowledge; it is likewise an attitude or disposition full of hope, of joy, of combative enthusiasm, of readiness for sacrifice. Certainly, Liebknecht was neither a "fool" nor a "mediocrity" when he shouted at the bourgeois Reichstag:

> "Is not socialism the highest morality, the pinnacle of selflessness, of self-sacrifice, of love for one's neighbor? If, during the time of the Anti-Socialist Law, we made the greatest sacrifices, if we put up with the destruction of our families and the loss of our livelihoods, if we were parted from our wives and children for long years—for the sole purpose of serving our cause—then that was religion. Yet not a priestly religion, but *the religion of humanity*. It was faith in the triumph of the good and of the idea."

Collected footnotes of the chapter. Might need reformatting

---

1. **Fr. Engels. Articles from 1871–1875. "Blanquists."**
   Publisher: *Znaniye*, p. 45.
   [Regarding Engels's religious views, we will speak in more detail in the final part of our book.]

2. **A. Pannekoek. *Religion and Socialism*.**
   Publisher: *Pravda*, pp. 6–7.

3. **F. Stampfer. *Religion is a Matter of Conscience for Each Individual*.**
   Publisher: *Pravda*, p. 27.

4. **Ibid.,** pp. 29–30.

5. **Vandervelde. *Socialism and Religion*.**
   Publisher: *Zemlya*, p. 67.

6. **Ibid.,** p. 68.

7. **L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Russian translation from the 4th German edition).**
   Publisher: *Mysl'* [*Thought*].

8. ***The Essence of Christianity*,** pp. XXII and XXIV.

9. ***The Essence of Christianity*,** p. 13.

10. **J. Dietzgen. *Religion of Social Democracy*.**
    Publisher: *Rabotnik*, p. 1.

11. **Ibid.,** p. 21.

12. *Dietzgen expressed further views on religion in other works, which we will discuss in the final part of this study. His position on religion attests both to his great power of insight and to a certain timidity of thought, as though it were constrained by the empty formulas of* ***libre-penseur*** *[free-thinker] ideology.*

3) Biological Definition of Religion

There can be no doubt that the first steps of religion are inextricably bound up with the first steps of science and poetry. Animism, the explanation of the phenomena of the world by analogy with humans—understood as manifestations of wills or spirits behind them—constitutes, for the primitive mind, both religion and poetry and science. Poetry and science are one and the same for him, because his hypotheses take on the living character of myth and because he does not distinguish between a hypothesis that satisfies him in any minimal way and the truth. Mythology, that primitive poetic science, becomes religion precisely because it not only clarifies nature for man from an objective perspective (as modern science does), nor merely gives free rein to the imagination (as modern art does), but also establishes a relationship between man

and the powerful beings surrounding him. It is not simple curiosity or a simple thirst for fantasy (*Lust zu liern*) that rules the primitive man; it is *practical need*.

For him to live, to satisfy the urgent call of his needs, man must act purposefully upon nature. Later, this intervention proves so potent that man (at first, the higher classes of society) goes from defending himself to going on the offensive. But originally, labor—being the only real way to act on nature—seemed miserably meager and pitiful. If at that time man had already conceived of nature as dead and indifferent to him, if he had already understood that he had no force at his disposal but his own neuromuscular energy, he would have been seized by despair.

Cognition is a necessary prerequisite for human labor, since human labor is conscious, goal-oriented activity. In studying nature, man interpreted it by analogy with himself. Animistic hypothesis is the simplest and most natural way to explain the world for a thoroughly uncritical mind. But it took hold and became hugely significant precisely because it met man's practical need. Confronted by a power too strong for him to fight, man drops to his knees, saying, so to speak, "I am small, I am pitiful." As before a powerful entity, he prostrates himself, as though saying, "I am entirely at your mercy; I am your thing!" Confronted by a mightier force, he stretches out his arms, begging for help, like a child entreating its mother. Like any potent being, he offers it gifts, hoping to sway its heart. It is in this way that man also behaves toward the great and mighty spirits that rule over material events, on whose favor his well-being and very existence depend.

It is only this living relationship of man to God or to the divine/spiritual dimension of nature that gives rise to the special phenomenon we call religion, which thus assumes animistic forms.

Religion presupposes, first and foremost, that people have needs and sufferings that they feel powerless to alleviate themselves. This, and only this, takes them beyond the bounds of the individual, impelling them to seek connections outside themselves, to look for allies, patrons. Religion is literally a "bond" (*re-ligio*).

Naturally, need always brings with it, in a more or less obscure or lucid form, some notion of the state that would arise if that need were satisfied. Hunger breeds the desire for food, a dream of satiety. As long as man has not gone far from the animal, he still does not make abstractions or generalize his sufferings or his dreams. When hungry, he prays to God to send fruit or game because he feels himself dependent on causes he does not understand and counts good fortune as the favor of a higher will. But once man learns to generalize, he begins to generalize his misfortunes: need, toil, illness, death. He notes that life is bad—or at least not what it ought to be for him to be happy. He imagines a blessed life, comprising all the conditions of his happiness. He relegates this fantasy, dictated by his unmet needs, to the past or to the future, or else thinks it exists somewhere else alongside him. He wonders how to influence the gods' will, so as to enter paradise or to bring paradise back or at last to bring it down to earth. The ideal is a dream—but not just any dream, it is a dream born of invincible needs. Religion connects the ideal to reality, discovering pathways from one to the other. Thus it becomes "idealized," for it grows more complicated. At first, religion connects a given need with its fulfillment; then it connects all needs with their ultimate, eternal satisfaction. It answers the living, organic longing for the fullness of life and for happiness. Because need, and therefore suffering, and

therefore—even if only in embryo—a notion of their satisfaction, are inherent in all organic life. An organism, being alive, has its own laws, which painfully clash with the laws of its environment.

In this sense, the Apostle Paul brilliantly touches on the essence of religion when he says:

> "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity—not of its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation groans and suffers together even until now; and not only it, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." *(Romans 8:18–24)*

Summarizing all that has been said and singling out from primitive science and primitive poetry the element that is specifically religious, we can define religion in the following way: **religion is a way of thinking about the world and a way of feeling about the world that, on the psychological plane, resolves the contradiction between the laws of life and the laws of nature.** This is a general definition of religion. It does not encompass all its essential facets, but its remaining features can be derived from it.

Animism provided nourishment, material, and form to the primitive religion thus understood. It afforded man—still terribly weak in knowledge and labor—the ability to hope, because knowledge was replaced by mythological creation, and labor by magic: prayer, rite, incantation.

But new times arrived. Man became more self-assured. Mythological creation gave way to metaphysics and finally to exact science; belief in magic collapsed and was replaced by belief in labor. In place of animism, we now have scientific energetics; in place of magic, modern technology. But has this altered anything in the *religious essence* of the human soul? Has man achieved happiness? Do no more longings live within him? Have his dreams of true happiness become fainter, his ideals duller or closer at hand?

If that were so, then Hartmann would be right. It would mean that humanity had become "positive," i.e., commercially calculating, easily contented, crawling and decrepit.

But in reality it is the reverse: never has human pride been as great as it is now. His hunger has become bottomless; what might appear happiness to a savage is paltry to modern man, who is forever driven forward, insatiable, so that Carlyle said with a shudder—but with truth—of man's essential nature:

> "Do you see that collier? You think that a hundred shillings would be enough for him to be satisfied? I tell you this: if Almighty God gave him half the earth, he would set his desire on the other half."

That greed, that lust for conquest, which the Greeks deemed a sin and the source of misfortune, we see as man's best side. We speak proudly of our eternal discontent, which is captured in the new poetical visions of titanic figures—Faust, Manfred. Longing lives on in man, and whoever cannot see the world in a religious way is condemned to pessimism—unless he is a mere philistine, ready to repeat with Chekhov's schoolteacher, "I am content, I am content."

If the longing of primitive man was simply the desire for life to continue, to shield himself from the assaults of the environment, then the new longing is the desire to *conquer* nature. That is the great transformation that has taken place in man's religious sensibility.

Hence, human need has grown, and his ideal has become more majestic. Meanwhile, any hope that there might be allied forces out there in the cosmos has collapsed: there is no other spirit in nature but man.

So what does it mean to *have* religion? It means to be able to think about and feel the world in such a way that the contradictions between the laws of life and the laws of nature are resolved for us. Scientific socialism resolves these contradictions by putting forward the idea that life will triumph, that the elements will bow to reason through knowledge and labor, science and technology.

Accordingly, we maintain that religion is alive and will remain alive, but that it has changed its forms entirely. Essentially, earlier religions also expressed the hunger for happiness and sought it through knowledge and labor. But now knowledge is at last cleansed, and labor is likewise cleansed. This purification of man's great tools from dross—this casting off of absurd hypotheses and false methods—could only raise religion to a new height, not destroy it.

To reinforce this, let us consider the same question from another angle.

I have already said that an individual who could singlehandedly fulfill his need would not require any religion; there would be no impassable gulf for that individual between his ideal and his reality. Religion, i.e. a way of thinking and feeling about the world that resolves the contradiction between ideal and reality, arises only where that contradiction is strongly felt. A pig at the trough, or a philistine in his "cup-overflowing" home, on one side, and "the gods" on the other, can both do without religion. True, that blissful equilibrium of the pig or the philistine is precarious, though he does not sense it for want of wit, and a firm sense of bliss never exists for the others. The needs of any mentally developed individual far exceed his own capabilities, and further development makes his ideal grow much faster than the improvement of his reality.

Dietzgen keenly noticed this side of things and stated it as: "In a democracy, place of belief in God is taken by the awareness of the individual's powerlessness… civilized human society is the supreme being in which we believe."

Science, the system, has no relationship at all to love or hope. The world is not only an object of knowledge or a realm where labor is carried out; the entire process of labor is evaluated in turn. But *to evaluate* means to relate what is being evaluated to our living needs. Science, the system, is a matter of the head and meets the head's needs; science answers the questions "how?" and

"what?" But it does not answer the questions "is it good or bad?" Religion, by contrast, answers these questions and draws practical conclusions. It confirms that there is evil in the world and seeks victory over it, and finds that victory in hope.

Dr. Koigen beautifully paints, so to speak, an emotional picture of religion and describes its value in his somewhat ambiguous, at times very distant from our own viewpoint, but profound book *The Worldview of Socialism*. He says the following about religion:

> "It comes unseen; it lifts and unites us, expands us, and brings us into harmony with the waves of the cosmic current, rolling on in royal fashion. Powerful and gentle, it awakens the feeling of true life, of deep immediacy, of prayer to the world. Our eyes open to all that is truly valuable and great, to all that is worthy of desire and is necessary. Past and future, 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow,' become an endless present that continues 'today.' This happens not by forgetting, not by means of romantic fantasy, but solely by means of a new socially creative act. The friend, the sister, the brother, one's neighbor, nature, the hope of victory over life's negatives, the mastery over the world and its transformation into a sphere of boundless creativity—all this begins to move happily, it all gleams and shines, everything gains its meaning and purpose. Once again we can look directly and confidently at the world; once again the immortality of life smiles upon us."[1]

Solving the religious problem of the world presupposes acknowledging a higher power akin to the individual, close to him, on whom he can stake his hopes. For the religious man of old, these were spirits, gods, or God, collectively expressing the superindividual element of religion. For the new, religion-minded individual, there exists only what he finds in experience, and he rejects anything beyond that. Yet in experience there are two great superindividual magnitudes: the cosmos and humanity. Here is where the new religious thinking settles.

We will have more to say about "cosmism." For now, let us note that scientific socialism is anthropological in Feuerbach's sense.[2]

The old religions contained the idea of the individual's immortal spirit in his creations. In them, the superindividual principle essentially came down to the acknowledgment that some higher being had a sort of patronage over the individual, yet the individual himself was effectively proclaimed eternal. If the thirst for individual immortality were truly a fundamental law of life, then the moment we gained irrefutable evidence that the concept of the soul is merely a necessary and natural delusion, religion would become impossible. But at the same time, only pessimism would remain—that is, a recognition of the complete irreconcilability of the ideal with reality, and hence an unconditional condemnation of the world. One would have to say, "The world is evil and will remain evil, for it contains death and will continue to do so, and life is incompatible with death." But in fact, life can be reconciled with death:[3] man can overcome death—and does so unconsciously through sexual love, procreation, and caring for his children, consciously through love for his species and his culture. Yet love for the species and for culture, within which man's 'spiritual' personality persists while his body dissolves into the material universe, is a genuine, profound, ardent, vibrant love, a feeling that is infinitely more irrational from the standpoint of "sensible egoism" than love for God, who supposedly guarantees

individual immortality and bliss. For an individualist, shifting the center of gravity from himself to his species—and initially to the superindividual intermediaries that foster the species' development (the school, the party, the class)—is always accompanied by a certain melancholic resignation. The grieving Mikhail Kramer, raising his son to heaven, said, "Not I, but you. Not I, but maybe you!" And in the father's words there was resignation, and sorrow, and despair, and hope.

But for the true socialist, there is no resignation at all here. He has penetrated deeply into the essence of the relationship between the individual and the species; for him, reality is the species, humanity, while the individual is only that reality's specific expression. Socialism is cooperation across time and space. By denying himself for the sake of the species, the individual finds himself made ten times stronger. Hence the socialist is *more* religious than the religious man of old. Maxim Gorky expressed this splendidly in his response to a *Mercure de France* survey:

> "An absolute conviction in the fact of progress," declared the famous writer, "must incite in a person a religious feeling—that is, a complex creative feeling of faith in one's own powers, of hope for victory, of love for life," and further: "Socialism signifies competition with past and future in science and art... a sense of connection with the past and the future. *This religious feeling must grow*."

End of Translation

Footnotes

1. Koigen, *The Worldview of Socialism*, Postman Publishers, p. 79. ↩

2. However, some Social Democrats—including Dietzgen—adhere to a cosmic–religious viewpoint, which I consider not entirely logical for a Social Democrat. ↩

4) Faith and Doubt

However, Koigen—whom we have mentioned—introduces us to yet another question, in discussing which we may lose the agreement of those who accept with us the possibility of a godless religion. Koigen equates the religious feeling with "spiritual-world confidence." He calls this confidence the "ferment of all religion." If this is indeed so, I am the first to declare that I am not religious, and that a scientifically-minded Social Democrat cannot be religious. Koigen says:

> "As a fundamental cultural value, religion is in correspondence with all other kinds of value in the cosmos. It pervades them in its own way. It confers on thought a faith

> in the world's meaning. It continually points living man to the perfection of life in the heights of meta-historical consciousness; it introduces into the lifeless causality and identity of the world the eternal breath of life. Man's sense of security in the world, as such, is also its affair."[1]

Faith in the world's meaning? That is, faith that the universe has a *human* meaning—correct? Because if it is not *human* meaning, then man cannot either understand it or accept it. But that is a frightening kind of anthropomorphism against which all science cries out. We are not idealists—we are materialists—in the sense that we find nothing in common between the laws of the physical world and our truths and ideals, our moral world. Laas is entirely correct in regarding freedom from "Platonism"—that is, the notion of moral forces supposedly governing the world—as the main prerequisite for honest cognition. With faith in the meaning of the world, we merrily return to animism, albeit in less coarse forms. Basically, whoever says "the world's meaning" is saying "God."

Alongside Nietzsche, we say: "Man! Your task is *not* to seek the world's meaning, but to *give* the world meaning." That implies subjugating the world to the spirit in its concrete form of *human society*; whereas faith in a ready-made world-meaning implies that the world has already been subjugated by a supra-natural spirit. "Man's sense of security in the world as such"—does it mean, for instance, confidence that some cosmic catastrophe will *not* annihilate humanity?

Harald Höffding, in his in many ways splendid *Philosophy of Religion*, profoundly defines religion as *concern for the fate of values*. Science leads us to the law of energy's eternality; yet even though energy remains quantitatively self-equal, it can vary in terms of its value for man. The death of a person—say, Lassalle or Marx, Raphael, Georg Büchner—alters nothing in the energy equations, but it is recognized as a misfortune, a loss in the world of feeling, in the realm of values.

Progress is, first of all, an increase in both the *quantity* and the *height* of cultural values. Is progress an immanent law of nature? In answering "yes," we become outright metaphysicians, for we assert something that science does not guarantee us.

In essence, science in general contains no guarantees of the absolute stability of its laws. Mill is correct on this point. When we say, "The earth will revolve on its axis in another ten, or one hundred, years," we are only expressing the highest degree of probability. The likelihood that the laws of nature remain firm is so great that, when facts contradict them, we say, "We formulated the laws poorly," and we reformulate them so that they encompass the exception. "The law of lawfulness"—that is, the principle "the same conditions produce the same result"—is endorsed by humanity's entire mass of experience. In fact, only this characteristic of nature makes it possible for life and thought to exist at all.

But science never bestows certainty, only probability—though often, in practical terms, that probability is equal to certainty.

What holds for science in general is true to a vastly greater degree of its complex predictions about the fate of the world, of the earth, of humanity.

Benedetto Croce speaks to this beautifully:

> "The future society, about which we speak so confidently—not as if it were our conjecture but as though its arrival were established by science—does not in fact possess a *subjective* character of necessity. Any historical forecast, even that of scientific socialism, can never have that character. In history we are always dealing with forces whose quantity and intensity remain undetermined; only a probability-based approach is possible. When such an approach reinforces our ideal aspirations, it engenders within us a living sense of hope. And to go further—namely, to practical tactics—we must believe in the significance of individual and collective efforts as elements that coordinate external forces and cooperate with them."

If socialism, as a future event, thanks to Marx's analysis of capitalist society's tendencies, has a probability approaching certainty, then the broader question—whether life, organic matter, and reason will *prevail* in their self-affirmation over mindless matter, over a nature that, like Cronus, is prepared to devour its own children—in this question science is on our side *far less*. No, the elemental course of things will not stop just to spare values. Archimedes, before dying, asked his killers not to disturb his drawings, but if humanity were to beg the deaf forces of nature not to wipe out its cultural beginnings, those forces would not halt their sweep, just as the sun cannot halt at the command of man.

And yet the same Archimedes who, with powerless gesture, shielded his diagrams from those rough brutes of muscle and steel who came to kill him also proudly declared that he would move the Earth if only he had a point of support. There is no limit to cognition and the technology based on it. Consider the psychic life of a mollusk—our ancestor—and compare it with wireless telegraphy! Meanwhile, the mind of humanity's descendant—not so distant, perhaps, if progress speeds on—will outstrip ours just as monstrously as Faraday's or Marconi's brain-power outstrips the capacity of a protozoon's nerve cells. There is no limit to the power of thought, i.e. the purposeful self-organization of the social brain/nervous system; nor, therefore, is there any limit to technological progress.

We can only say that a *battle* lies ahead. That battle will commence on a scale never before seen, specifically after the victory of socialism's social principles. Socialism is the organized struggle of humanity against nature, aimed at bringing the elements fully under reason's sway. In the hope of victory, in the striving, the tension of forces—this constitutes the new religion. Together with the apostle Paul, we can say: "We are saved by hope." The new religion cannot foster passivity, as effectively all religions do that offer an unconditional guarantee of good's triumph; the new religion pours *entirely* into action. "Man was not born for contemplation," said Aristotle, "but for action," and the principle of devout contemplation is now driven from religion and replaced by the principle of ceaseless activity.

The new religion, the religion of humanity, the religion of labor, offers no guarantees. But I maintain that, even *without God* and without "guarantees"—which are themselves but masks of that same God—it remains a religion.

End of Translation

Footnotes

1. *Ibid.*, p. 78 [Reference to Koigen, *The Worldview of Socialism*, p. 78]. ↩

Organism and Environment. The First Solution of the Religious Problem

Modern biology (especially in the profound theory of one of the greatest of today's biologists, Le Dantec) teaches us that the entire life of an organism is an exchange of energy and matter between the organism and its environment. The environment shapes the organism. If we examine any act performed by the organism, we see that it is a chemical-mechanical reaction to environmental influences. The causes determining the form of this reaction lie in part within the environment, in part within the organism itself. Yet the organs that, by virtue of their structure, determine the nature of the organism's reaction to the environment's stimuli are themselves the outcome of prior functions. We might say that they are crystallized solutions to problems posed by nature—problems generally very categorical in their urgency: either adapt, i.e. manage to preserve your life under new conditions, or else be destroyed, die, cease to be a coherent organism, disintegrate into constituent elements. Whatever continued living, therefore, must have found a solution to the Sphinx's riddle. Thus the organism in its entirety is a product of external forces. True, new changes in its brain system or in certain organs are determined by the properties the organism possessed *before* the onset of conditions that triggered these changes, but those prior properties also arose through the same process.

Nevertheless, the organism is something quite distinctive, sharply distinguished from inanimate nature: the very essence of a living organism is that it amounts entirely to a *striving to live,* to persist as itself, to maintain the coordination of all its parts. That is an objective biophysiological fact for an external observer. But we have no right to picture the organism as an automaton that preserves itself mechanically. We also encounter it as a *feeling subject*. The organism suffers when external forces intrude, disturbing the harmony of its internal parts and processes; it suffers when it fails to find in the outside world the conditions necessary for the ongoing, orderly, and all-round performance of its functions. It experiences pleasure when it regains a relative harmony of its functions and, even if this requires fairly significant alteration of the brain or of some other organ, it still feels itself to be "itself"; it senses that it has changed, *yet* in

that very act of changing it asserts its identity. And there is total parallelism and functional interdependence between these facts of self-awareness and the physiological facts that can be observed objectively (i.e. a particular change in one set of phenomena corresponds to a particular change in the other).

A complex organism is one adapted for numerous self-preservation reactions. But if a complex organism is able to defend itself in a myriad of ways, it also makes many demands on its environment for a complete and multi-faceted development. All its many organs must function in order for it to grow during the period of general growth and to sustain itself upon attaining maturity. For each organism, we could theoretically construct a "best of all possible worlds," in which its life might reach the highest fullness. In reality, organisms in the overwhelming majority of cases do not find themselves in ideal conditions. The environment is unyielding, subject to its own laws that do not take the organism's needs into account. The struggle for existence among individuals of the same species and of different species, combined with all the hardships and misfortunes of the inanimate environment, weighs upon the organism and, if it does not physically destroy it, destroys the possibility of full development for one organ or another, or one or another skill, pushing its already constrained life down a more or less one-sided path. Under changed conditions, this very one-sidedness can lead to its demise. The organism constantly and naturally feels the burden of its environment. Everything alive suffers. If circumstances are even somewhat favorable—i.e. if there is an abundance of nourishment and a variety of stimulating factors in the environment—the organism and the species progress through heredity, i.e. they develop their organs' strength and well-adapted perfection to a considerable extent. This testifies to the power of life. But in the majority of cases, the struggle for life is of an oppressive nature that does not allow for comprehensive development, for a fullness of life, for the maximum self-assertion. Let us note that those species and individuals that do develop a broad diversity of strong, well-defined organs and skills strike man as naturally beautiful (symmetry, strength, grace, health, intelligence). Naturally, beauty and the joyful vitality that corresponds to it are relative. We repeat: genuinely ideal environmental conditions are extremely rare; for that reason, almost every species and individual in nature displays faults, inadequacies, and limitations. When Plato imagined the perfect "idea" of the horse, of the bird, and so on, he was following in the footsteps of Greek idealism, which had already been manifested in myths and sculpture—a conscious, idealistic expression of the possibility of life hidden in all living creatures, of the spontaneous longing for a fullness of life, for a complete realization of those predispositions that, in all of us, develop only imperfectly under the influence of a nature so remote from purposiveness, of a blind "nature."

A chain of plainly perceived discrete sufferings and deprivations, and a general sense that the laws within (which desire full development of latent possibilities) do not match the laws outside—this is the lot of living organisms in the overwhelming majority of instances. This mismatch between the laws of life and the laws of the environment *first* becomes consciously recognized *by man,* and by no means in the earliest ages of his existence on earth. At the beginning, only particular instances are grasped—just as happens with animals—and the same purely animal elements are present: pain or privation, followed by the impulse to remove the pain, to satisfy one's hunger, thirst, sex drive, desire for movement, etc.; where this is

impossible, there is daydreaming, i.e. images formed by imagination, lit by desire, of an object needed to resolve one's vital difficulty.

But man is additionally *a social being,* i.e. a cooperating being. When he is thirsty, he not only looks around for, say, fruit, but he also looks around for a stick with which to knock down a fruit that hangs too high (a tool). He looks around for another person who might give him food or help him secure it by pointing out its location or by actively collaborating. Still, another person seems to his fellow man but a feeble ally. Neither another man nor even a tribe can settle, once and for all (or even approximately), the contradiction that is becoming ever clearer to him between his needs and his surroundings.

The less keenly this contradiction is felt, the less scope there is for religion, of course. Yet the reverence some "savages" show the community—the tribe, or the "mir" (commune)—already has about it a religious tinge. Not I but you. *I* cannot, but *you*—the "world"—can; the community is more important, higher than I. Reverence and self-sacrificing love (as an outcome of how one evaluates oneself in relation to the community) with regard to the tribe, the state (*polis*), or a kingdom, empire—this "patriotism" is religion in a far higher degree (even if its supernatural coloring is entirely secondary) than, say, the fetishist's relation to his block-god. The latter does not, in fact, consider his idol to be absolutely higher than himself; he merely regards it as a talisman, magically capable of helping him achieve something, just as a key can open a locked trunk. I therefore believe it is a mistake to leave the history of patriotism and communal feeling out of the history of religion while including all the trifles of fetishism (magic). At any rate, for primitive man, as well as for the barbarian and even for the "barbarian of our time," society is too weak an ally. Man could not settle on real patriotism as religion primarily for two reasons.

First, society rapidly disintegrated, breaking up into mutually hostile classes and individual families. Any consciousness of society's wholeness was likely restricted to the minds of the ruling class, and even there only when that aristocracy was in its prime. From this followed the demise of tribal and then of state religions, which in any case never filled the entire field of humanity's religious awareness. And that demise came about for the second reason: once man had reached animism by analyzing nature, he extended the possibility of purposeful cooperation and help beyond the boundaries of the human world to the elements, or rather to the wills that animate those elements—wills that infinitely and plainly exceed humanity's will in power; for them, *for those wills,* everything is possible.

When man can formulate in general statements his religious feeling, he says: "From my viewpoint, the world is poorly made; life here is suffering. But this contradiction can be entirely eliminated; blessedness can be granted. By *whom?*—by gods, by person-like wills that rule the world."

Such is the first solution to man's religious problem.

2) The Importance of Primitive Religion for Man

1. A particular fatalism or "harmonism," which presupposes that all the facts of cultural history were "rational" in their own time, that they were necessary from the standpoint of development, must be discarded as a kind of metaphysics. The social destiny of humanity unfolds with the same blind lack of purpose and the same wastefulness as purely elemental processes do. Conscious human governance of its own fate is a matter for the future.

But of course, while far from everything in human history was necessary *in the teleological sense*—for much of it was superfluous, even harmful, from a developmental perspective—*all* of it was necessary *in the genetic sense,* i.e., it was absolutely determined and inevitable. This is why nothing is more naïve than lamenting or approving the past or constructing visions of how history "ought to have been." Not only the religious problem itself, but also *its theological solution,* was inevitable. Criticism in the strict sense is misplaced here. One can only uncover the path by which people arrived at the error that was inevitable for them, and then indicate in what ways that error actually furthered, and in what ways it hindered, the development of man.

Nietzsche observes that the imperfection of the sense organs was generally to man's advantage. He explains this paradox by pointing out that the generalization of the individual into the universal concept became possible only because the primitive person was incapable of perceiving the enormous gulf of differences from one human being to another, from one tree to another, and so forth. A somewhat vague resemblance—an indistinct likeness—formed the basis of human logic. Otherwise, the living being would have been lost in these distinctions, which would have hidden their similarities from view, and it would never have developed general reactions applicable to an entire class of objects or phenomena all at once. Be that as it may, it is beyond question that errors, illusions, often play a protective role. The primitive *child-man* lived in a world of fantasy, populating nature with anthropomorphic beings. Admittedly, the relationships among people (those of different tribes) were not such that the concept "man-like being" automatically equaled the concept "friendly being." And the "behavior" of predatory animals or the relentless forces of nature would immediately suggest that spirits and gods are far from being benevolent creatures—that they more often tend to torment man, guilty or not. Even so, it was possible to reach an accord with them, just as with foreigners from another tribe. Worship of the crocodile, the tiger, the wind, the sun, thunder—these were essentially more or less systematic attempts to make a pact with these beings, to extend the network of mutual "covenants" that once united clans and tribes to include these mighty allies as well.

Treaties often led nowhere; they were broken by the gods. Even then man tended to enlarge his stock of hope, gradually convincing himself that the gods very seldom, or never, break their

treaty with the pious, god-fearing individual who observes all the rites. And the idea of the possibility of such a covenant made life itself more endurable, shielding childish man from the terror of his situation, the dread of being abandoned among blind and deaf, callous and mindless, boundless elements that were only then coming into his awareness.

It was *the possibility of a covenant* that derived from the mythic-animistic interpretation of nature. This illusion led to a vast number of wild deeds, to absurdities, but it gave man a sense of confidence. Were it not for that—had man understood, at that time, that he was surrounded by an alien emptiness—he might not have borne the weight of such pessimism, and would have perished. The prospect of losing this "covenant" and finding oneself outside a pact with the gods always evoked profound terror in a mind still intellectually immature. A covenant with the gods is impossible as a treaty of equals: it is an acknowledgment of dependence. Thus, in approaching a god to request something, all signs of humility and submission are displayed, and on top of that, gifts and tributes are offered, sacrifices are made.

At first, this relationship with the god is marked by some measure of simplicity: one could still come before a powerful man without bending one's back, asking with a steady voice. In the event of refusal, perhaps a fight would ensue. But for the mind of the primitive tribal man, the god appears stronger than a human being—yet only in the way, for instance, a crocodile or a tiger is. Initially, a "spirit" is likely the spirit of a deceased person who has admittedly acquired many superhuman traits. Even if the notion of spirits beyond the souls of the dead does emerge, such spirits are nonetheless conceived in fairly analogous terms. But society develops; leaders appear, and finally kings. The society of spirits also differentiates; there too arise spirit-kings—*gods* in the proper sense. Let them be the ancestors of a reigning house; the distance between them and the king himself grows in step with the distance between king and aristocracy, between aristocracy and the people. That "pathos of distance," so celebrated by Nietzsche, rears its head—one of humanity's basest psychological features, the most repellent among its socially conditioned psychic maladies.

Sacrifices grow colossal. An old god was satisfied with food from the table—merely the "hungry shadow" of a dead brother. The new god, like a monarch, requires rivers of blood, hecatombs. Beyond even that, to prove one's submission, a person must sacrifice what is dearest. Only then is the covenant stable. Self-castration and self-torture repeatedly appear as tokens of devotion to the god in hopes of securing his favor. Of course, if this fearful practice spread beyond a narrow sect, it would destroy entire peoples; thus, self-castration is replaced by circumcision, a gentler sign of it. For a long time and over wide areas, the sacrifice of firstborn children, of children in general, raged. The Jewish God, who in modern times has been turned into a silver-bearded Father of all, did not stay Jephthah's hand when he condemned his young daughter—who knew no husband—to death; His ears were not moved by the songs she sang in the mountains with her friends, lamenting her youthful virginity. How much blood and tears man has drawn from himself and others in fulfillment of custom! The mightiest tragic work in the world, *The Oresteia*, revolves around the lament, the grief, and the rage of the human heart at the sacrificial pyre of Iphigenia.

But the bloodthirsty kings and petty monarchs pass away in their time; an aristocratic-constitutional or democratic order grows. Man rebels against the cruelty of the gods. He comes to value his own person more, along with another's capacity for labor and the dignity of man in general. The gods are forced to relent in their extortion, gradually exchanging Isaacs for rams, rams for incense and flowers. The gods become vegetarians. They make of necessity a virtue, and that reform is ascribed to them in the end. But even then, returns to the old ways can flare up. In a moment of crisis, the Carthaginians regretted having offered the god only the children of slaves as nourishment and hurled hundreds of their own children into Moloch's burning maw.

Yet humankind preserved an ironic memory of how it tricked the gods—in fairy tales. Solemn myths speak of an angel stopping Abraham's hand, or of Zeus's lightning striking the man-eating Korybantes, whereas the fairy tale says something else. Formerly, whenever major structures were built, people renewed their contract with the gods through human sacrifice. Later they decided that the gods could do well enough with an animal. And look—bridges, towers, canals turned out no worse for it. Fairy tales replace God with Satan (commonly used in Christian tales as a stand-in for the old gods). With a sly wink, they recount in connection with every ancient bridge the tale of a hermit who purchased from the devil the right to build a bridge at the cost of the first soul that traversed it—only to send a huge black cat across in place of a human. The Chinese and the Egyptians went further still: the former sacrificed paper effigies of people, while the latter simply *drew* their lavish offerings on the walls of temples and tombs. Thus man freed himself from the heavy tribute due the gods, but clung doggedly to the *very idea* of a pact. Still today, people promise to light candles to saints and to God, and they burn incense. Then again, who knows? The great Pythagoras, who spoke so divinely well against bloody sacrifices, is said to have forgotten his prudent vegetarianism out of joy upon discovering his famous "pants" (the Pythagorean theorem about the right triangle) and to have sacrificed a hundred oxen to the Muses. Do you imagine the Nine Sisters bathed in bull's blood or devoured that mountainous feast? No—"for the glory of the Muses," it was eaten by the priests, those whom Nietzsche called "the devourers of beefsteaks." If Heaven now needs only candles and incense, it is still quite fond of those who give more substantial goods to the clergy and to the monasteries. Sacrifices to gods, sacrifices to priests—all are man's sacrifices of what he values, an offering to the crucial illusion [he embraced] on the earliest levels: the illusion that a pact with the almighty wills ruling nature is possible.

But the first religious form (theology) gave mankind good service not only by providing this illusion. Its other helpful services, too, came at a steep cost.

2. The theory that derives all religion from belief in the souls of the dead and from the cult of ancestors strikes me as one-sided. According to [Karl] Lippert, for example, the crocodile was revered because it devoured corpses and was therefore a living tomb. By that logic, he tries to account for all animal worship, neglecting the fact that those animals might be revered in their role as dangerous or useful powers. As Lippert would have it, the sun is worshiped solely on the basis of an idea that ancestors' souls migrated there. This is obviously a stretch. But that does not disprove the importance of ancestor worship in shaping primitive religious consciousness. A man's spirit—especially that of a

> significant and powerful man—could do much harm or good. One could not simply disregard his rights or leave his soul without food and prayer after his death, nor could one violate his commands. Everywhere, the elders naturally serve as the guardians of the tribe's customs and habits, its living tradition. Transmitting the clan's experience, the beginnings of its technique and hygiene, was of tremendous importance, especially in the absence of even moderately advanced writing. The departed elders remained the fantastic guardians of custom, and in their capacity as invisible yet mighty spirits, they became even more formidable protectors of life's wisdom and of primordial law than they had been while living.[1] This mental accumulation and transmission of experience, standing apart from biological heredity, is a new, purely human force in organic life's struggle with its environment. And originally it could not, without greater harm, have had the fluidity or flexibility it now has.

Custom was initially imperative, categorical, like instinct, though it was not innate. At the start, custom was, so to speak, the tribe's or clan's "instinct," imposing its commands unconditionally upon individuals through the voice of the elders. Religion offered tremendous support to the power of tradition, for thanks to religion, tradition was deemed sacred, hallowed, mysterious. It taught that the spirits stood guard over it, and that any man lacking a covenant with them was condemned to destruction.

The negative side of this phenomenon is obvious. If tradition is helpful, and anything that fortifies it is useful, it can also stifle new, living forces. Like a physiological instinct, tradition reduces the cost of painful experimentation by providing a kind of inherited capital, but it also leaves too little room for further development. Human infants, far less endowed with instinct and therefore utterly helpless at birth, can adapt themselves in an infinitely more varied and flexible way to their particular environment. On the lower rungs of development, a religion-hardened tradition is akin to an instinct necessary for the stability of the community; but at a later stage, it becomes a blatant obstacle to the abundant mobility that accompanies social differentiation, and humanity faces a harsh struggle against the heritage of the fathers: the dead, who once supported the living, eventually seize and bind them with the firm hand of a skeleton.

Even here we see a phenomenon similar to what we noted in the evolution of sacrifices. Living needs compel new methods of labor, fresh customs, new forms of clothing, diet, and so on; yet man fears to break with the gods, to violate his pact with them—and so he preserves *the old ways* in his dealings with the spirit world, declaring them sacred. All nations have offered their gods foods long since out of common use; the Egyptians strictly forbade burying the dead in any garments but ancient linen of a particular cut; in sacrifices, they used stone knives, and so forth. Even today, in the Orthodox Church, the priest goes about—even in the street, but especially in the sanctuary—robed in Byzantine court attire, believing it is more acceptable to the Lord God than is a frock coat. In heaven, they are conservative about dress, as well as about language: only dead languages are spoken there. It has not always been possible to circumvent so easily the ritual prescriptions poised to swallow one's every step. The struggle can be hard and bloody; innovators perish; if they do not triumph, an entire nation stagnates and rots away internally until it is conquered by a neighbor who has surpassed it.

3. Even at relatively early stages of human experience, conflicts may arise between the community and an individual's instincts. With society's further differentiation, the possibility grows. Law, above all, expresses the centripetal force—those interests belonging to the community. There is no doubt that a community with the wisest laws—that is, one that organizes its internal life most effectively for the prevailing conditions, where absolute obedience is the rule—will be the strongest in the face of external enemies. Public opinion, commonly called morality, supplements the law. But what lends it special force in its struggle with more centrifugal tendencies, with the individual's urge to trample a neighbor's or the community's interests for personal gratification or profit, is *religious sanction*. The gods, the guardians of covenants, keep invisible and perpetual watch.[2]

The All-Seeing One sits atop the sky (Varuna, Ouranios, *Dios patēr*), casting his lightning bolt at the oath-breaker. Thus does man harness his deep-seated dread of nature and its forces for policing purposes, via a moral-mythical interpretation of natural phenomena. The sun—all-seeing; the stars—eyes; lightning—punishment: all these act as witnesses and judges, along with entire assemblies of spirits, hovering around living humans.

Once society splits into classes, the laws of the state become openly unjust. Their wisdom can no longer remain solely a matter of the efficient organization of labor, marriage, military defense: it must, insofar as possible without neglecting these aims, guarantee the unpunished and as extensive as possible exploitation of the lower classes by the upper. In most cases—though, as we shall see, not always—religion sides with the law, even if that law is obviously class-based. The gods become the gods of the masters. They either look down on the commoner and the slave, striking him for any offense with the same pitiless harshness as the law, or they glorify the slave's meekness and nonresistance as a virtue, promising him a reward in another world. By cementing class society and supporting the ruling class, religion becomes a counterrevolutionary force, sometimes disastrous for society. "How can I raise my hand against my master, when the dazzling Marduk, father of his fathers, stands behind him—and with him all his angels?" the Babylonian commoner thinks, adding to his real shackles an imaginary chain that paralyzes him above all else. "How can I raise my hand against my master? Is it not God's will that he should rule and I should obey, and is not salvation reserved for him who endures to the end?" thinks the Christian slave.

Yet religion is not *always* counterrevolutionary. The rebelling slaves may have their *own* god. Their own national deity might appear if they are an oppressed people, or perhaps some divinity beloved of the lower strata of society. By a remarkable coincidence of circumstances, the God of the Hebrews—Yahweh Sabaoth—long remained primarily the god of the lower classes in rebellion, across all religiously colored European revolutions. Even in the French revolutions (the Great Revolution and those that followed) and in the Italian revolution, Yahweh—somewhat reworked by his newer prophets, Rousseau and Mazzini—strove to stand at the head of the revolutionary people. One can hardly doubt that the cry *"God is with us!"* proved an inspiration, thereby strengthening the impetus for revolt. But as we shall see, even the most revolutionary god brings with him his share of profound misfortunes.

Footnotes

1. Illnesses were interpreted as punishments from the spirits. ↩

2. This role of god is wonderfully expressed in a hymn to Varuna in the Rig Veda: ↩

   > "The great Lord of these worlds sees all, as though he were omnipresent. If a person thinks he walks in secret, the gods are aware of everything. Whether a man stands or goes, or hides himself, whether he lies down or rises up, King Varuna knows it; if two people sit together whispering, Varuna is the third present among them. This earth too belongs to King Varuna, as does that vast heaven. If anyone should try to fly beyond the sky, he still would not escape Varuna. His messengers, descending from the heavens, traverse the world. Thousand-eyed Varuna sees through all the earth."

---

3) Priest

One result of social differentiation (the initial division of labor, later the breakup into classes) was the appearance of the independent figure of the priest.

A priest assumes the responsibility of communicating with the gods, mediating between them and humans. He is capable of transmitting people's supplications to the gods *in proper form*. This becomes increasingly impossible for the layman, because the gods understand—or willingly listen to—only the old language, the language of their ancestors (indeed, they themselves *are* our ancestors, or those of kings). The priest also knows how to offer a proper sacrifice. The science of correct prayer and correct sacrifice, the knowledge of incantations and rites, makes up an entire complex course in *magic*—i.e., a direct influence on the gods (the wills that guide nature)—as opposed to powerless labor, which is a way of acting, so to speak, upon nature's *body*. Without faith in magic, man would feel terribly helpless.

A magician always has a thousand ways to dodge responsibility if his manipulations fail, while in the event of success he may become a bona fide miracle worker.

Initially, however, priests have in their hands not just the tribe's magical repertoire, but also its *semi-rational* hygiene and medicine—often *all* the young science—mingled with magic. Thus, the priest is the learned intellectual of olden times. The principal role of the priest in Egypt, India, and Persia is that of a scholar, though one whose knowledge remains shrouded in the secrecy of the corporation, mixed with superstitious rituals, myths, and dogmas, and sanctified by the special halo of being "beyond reason."

The priest soon learns how to profit from his advantageous position. Where the master's sword falls short, the priest's spiritual power is still sufficient. A master can chop men to pieces, whereas a priest poisons their souls, educating them in habits of thought that serve the interests of his caste. He is disinclined to quarrel with the warrior caste, whether he submits to it as an honored subject or dominates it as his most potent ally.

If the priestly caste flourishes, if its intellect expands and its experience grows, then the priest himself loses his reverential fear of tradition. He does not break with that tradition, because he by no means wishes to undermine his authority, entrenched over centuries and with tenacious roots in people's minds. But he pours new content into the dogmas, myths, and rituals—content that reconciles the contradictions he has noted, that better matches his acquired knowledge and the sharpness of his thinking. That is how priests develop an *esoteric*, a secret doctrine, where the garb of ancient myths conceals new truths.

Esoteric knowledge sometimes tears off its shell, flings wide the tightly sealed doors, and steps out onto the streets and highways with a new message. But such "traitors"–reformers do not always succeed. The old priesthood rises up against them as turncoats; meanwhile, the lay population is often far too unprepared to receive the new truths. The reform of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) appears to have taken precisely that form. In part, we can say the same of Luther's reformation. In other cases, prophets drew abundantly on the priests' esoteric wisdom while belonging to a different class—being the natural products of broad social shifts in power. Examples: Buddha, Mohammed.

The split in the priest's service to religion into an esoteric and an exoteric function already amounts to a kind of deception. To justify himself in conscience, the priest must adopt either a cynical conviction that a purely political, self-interested necessity compels him to keep the black masses, the laity, in the darkness of ignorance and superstition, or else—like the Grand Inquisitor—to persuade himself that superstition is the only sort of nourishment accessible to coarse minds and that truth is withheld from them for their own good.

Indeed, the esotericism of priests can reach all the way to complete freethinking, atheism, and blasphemy.

Still, the priest remains aware of the possibility of his social mission: *maintaining order*—that is, enabling the aristocracy and the priesthood itself to exploit the working masses with impunity.

Today's clergy reached this stage of development a long time ago, in the persons of its keenest minds. Quite a few popes clearly grasped the political emptiness of Christianity, in which they themselves did not believe in the slightest. The more limited priests, who sincerely trust in their dogmas and in the power of their rites, serve as an instrument in the hands of a politicized church.

Ruskin—himself a believer and Christian—did not hesitate to write the following lines:

> "The entire essence of our national religion lies in the performance of religious rites and the preaching of soporific 'truths'—if not outright lies—that keep the masses tied to their burdens, while we live at our ease."

Needless to say, governments and ruling classes, even if they themselves have long since ceased to believe, prize the priest for his services and by no means dare to unmask fully those "soporific truths." Priests seem to hate none so fiercely as two French freethinkers, Voltaire and Renan. To the orthodox, they are servants of the Antichrist. Yet even though they reject the very core of the Christian religion, both supported it as a dominant social institution.

Voltaire speaks of this:

> "The real and main reason I think belief in God is necessary lies in the conviction that society requires a God who rewards and punishes. Without such a God, we would remain in misfortunes without hope, and in vice without remorse. If one admits that faith in God keeps even a few people from crime, one admits that all mankind ought to accept that faith."

To this we can add another reflection by the great freethinker:

> "The people are always coarse and dull. They are bulls who need a yoke, a driver, and feed… I suppose there must be ignorant folk. If you were a landowner, as I am, you would endorse my proposition: when the rabble starts to reason, all is lost."

And here we have the view of the mild-tempered Renan—such a fervent defender of freedom for scientific thought—expressed in the preface to *Les Apôtres* ("The Apostles"):

> "Let us avail ourselves of the freedom of the sons of God, but be wary of sharing in the debasement of virtue that would threaten our society were Christianity to be undermined. What would become of us without it? What might replace such strongholds of seriousness and piety as Saint-Sulpice, or such charitable brotherhoods as the Sisters of Mercy? How not to shrink at the pettiness, the narrowness of heart poised to flood the world? In scientific matters we differ from the defenders of positive religion, but at heart we are with them."

One can only say that Voltaire is more candid, Renan more skilled. If the clergy is still powerful now, it is certainly not because of any "positive" service to humanity, as was once the case in the heyday of the Eastern priesthood or in medieval Europe. Its might lies solely in its service to the upper class of society.

What nowadays is called "positive religion" is nothing but an instrument of subjugation, and the churches are structures of that subjugation. While we Social Democrats must not allow our broad social struggle to be replaced by mere anticlericalism, neither must we forget for an instant that the priest is an uncompromising and earnest foe of the proletariat, and hence of humanity at large—a foe who cannot even claim the justification that the bourgeois capitalist

has, for the latter at least is still indispensable to socialism as a force that prepares the ground for it. The historical role of the priest has by now become entirely detrimental.

4) Prophet

A covenant with the gods or with God is the foundation of life in human societies of the old religious type. The entire world is viewed as a single society, and thus the alliance with the most powerful elements of that world-society—the rulers of the elements—commands an extreme value. Laws and customs are sanctified not only by covenants among human beings but also by covenants—"testaments"—between people and divinities. Religion and actual life remain inextricably entwined. If society develops, if a revolution matures within it, if it breaks apart into warring classes, all this inevitably has to find expression in religion and take on a religious complexion.

In secular societies, the spokesmen of contending tendencies are orators and publicists; in religious societies, they are called prophets.

A prophet calls for a revision of the covenant with God, and such a revision always entails a reexamination of social relations as well. In the person of the prophet, the new understanding of truth about nature and society—of new, or perhaps newly strengthened, social elements—comes to expression. Yet typically prophets appeal to the past, calling their reforms a restoration of the ancient truth, while denouncing what they consider harmful teachings and morals as pernicious novelties.

Only at more advanced levels of social development does tradition lose its aura, and prophets begin to acknowledge the novelty of their truths and speak of a new covenant. Even then, they carefully establish a link with the past. Jesus said that he came *to fulfill* the law of the Old Testament, not to break it. Muhammad built on Moses and Jesus. The Eternal Gospel of the Holy Spirit, which arose in the thirteenth century, also relied on them, even though it claimed to be the "third," the most recent covenant.

For a long time, the art of public discourse took the form of prophecy, both in the pre-Christian and the Christian world. At the same time, prophecy fell into two types: genuine and *epigraphic*.

Prophets, in the true sense, were not predictors of the future. They foretold events the way modern publicists and sociologists do. Darmsteter's definition of prophetic foreknowledge could be just as well applied to Condorcet, Saint-Simon, or Marx:

> "The prophet sees the future in its most general outlines because, having formed a particular philosophical conception of history, he knows with certainty what will befall his people once they have set foot on a given path. The overall movement of facts and ideas, with all their necessary distant consequences, is the only thing that interests him; the details, the concrete events, naturally escape him. He leaves their prediction to charlatans."[1]

Yet sometimes we find in prophetic books unusually detailed predictions—evidence that the book or the relevant passage was written *post factum*, then invested with the aura of prophecy in order to lend weight to its message, and occasionally credited to some ancient and illustrious prophet's name. The great prophets always stand at crossroads, in the midst of turbulent social struggle. They give it a rallying cry, generalize it, fix an eagle's eye on the future, lash out at the enemies of their idea, and console their supporters.

Two factors make the prophet a mysterious and hieratic figure: first, as we have already said, in a religious society no revolution or far-reaching reform can occur that does not also constitute a revolution in relations with God. Thus, the prophet is obligated to speak in God's name. Social, political, or moral demands, if *not* presented as the demands of some mighty deity, are unthinkable and ineffective in a religious society. Whenever they arise in that raw, secular form, it denotes the collapse of the theological foundations of society in general.

Second, in psychological terms, the prophet perceives himself as the instrument of a higher will. Systematic thought and inquiry are foreign to man in his infancy and youth; in that age, he does not *reason* so much as *create poetically*. Insights and comparisons flash suddenly through his head; he finds them by inspiration, by an upsurge of nerves. He does not reason but *sees* a succession of symbolic images; he does not teach, but proclaims—sometimes in song. For the prophet, the state of heightened excitement, of inspiration verging on hallucinations and fits, that condition of "clairvoyance," is supremely important: in those dazzling moments, what had slowly been ripening in his mind during ordinary days is illuminated like lightning. Poets today still speak of inspiration as if it were some sort of call or visitation—this is a fact of their inner experience. Publicists in the old society—that is, prophets—were recruited from among poetic, not scientific, temperaments. A phlegmatic scholar could not yet rise to prominence; it was hysterical-epileptic characters (every inspiration is a mild epilepsy, a flooding of the brain with blood) who became the leaders of young humanity. Inspiration, being abnormal, is a heightened disorder; it is hardly surprising that the young mind failed to distinguish clearly between the sick and the inspired.[2]

Prophets—publicists, teachers, revolutionaries—arose from circles in opposition to the official priesthood, as popular, democratic bearers of truth. Among them we find hysterics, charlatans, hypnotists, fortune-tellers, and healers, traveling from place to place in groups or alone. They prophesied in trance, spoke in riddling imagery, clowned around, tricked their audiences, and scarcely knew themselves where deception ended and truth began. The common people regarded them as superior beings with access to hidden mysteries. The priests eyed them askance as usurpers threatening their income and influence. When the masses, driven to despair or newly aware of their own strength, rose up in revolt under their own banners against the apex

of society's pyramid, those "god-possessed" individuals took the lead, and from their murky and downtrodden ranks emerged the true prophets—political and spiritual leaders. Naturally, a prophet might suddenly appear from another class, but he *had* to carry the hallmark of possession—he had to be poetic, inspired. A poetic genius, an uncommon ability to synthesize and unite the stray new feelings, ideas, and aspirations, a knack for decoding the language of facts, and a gift for imparting brilliance and ardor to the new doctrine thus discovered—these qualities remain essential hallmarks even for prophets of the new, secular society. I am referring to great leaders of revolutions. Yet since we no longer believe in magic during social upheavals, since we have drawn near to an understanding of reform and revolution as *labor* acts that must rest on knowledge of social forces and tendencies if they are to succeed, we now demand something more of our prophets than passion, energy, the warmth of love, poetic imagery, and the ability to coin slogans. We also require *cool reflection*, the restraint of objective analysis. Can one person unite both of these traits? Yes—after all, we have witnessed just such a marvel. The greatest prophet of the world taught us—*Marx*.

This transformation in prophecy is not confined to the rise of systematic research and reflection beside the whirlwind of inspiration. Self-criticism in a leader and the clarity of the new humanity's consciousness prevent us from viewing the new prophet as a mysterious, supernatural being. The leader, the genius, remains *divine* in the beauty and grandeur of his feelings, but we already know that he is not God's tool, but rather the mature fruit of humanity, begotten by lengthy efforts in thought and emotion, aided by a lucky convergence of biologically favorable conditions. Nor does the prophet require an appeal to God any longer, for the new society is no longer built on covenants with Him. By and large, faith in the immeasurably supreme importance of a covenant with God has collapsed once and for all; class interests, class struggle, and class agreements within society (or internationally beyond it) now either stand forth openly in all their nakedness, or else hide under the cloak of reasonableness, expedience, objective rationality, the common good, and so on. But even so, *great revolutions,* along with the *great ideas* that spark them, and the bearers of these ideas—the prophets, together with the masses who follow their inspiration—do not cease to be a *religious* phenomenon. Wherever self-sacrifice for a lofty cause becomes commonplace, the *religious spirit* is moving among men. There reigns the spirit of the species, the drive toward mighty conquests of the future; there individuals unite among themselves in their aspiration to a coming happiness and perfection; there man exerts himself to conquer his own limitations and *create God out of himself and his brothers*.

Ferdinand Lassalle speaks as a true prophet when he says:

> "There is nothing that can confer a higher seal of dignity and morality upon a class than the awareness that it is predestined to rule, that it must raise the principle of its class to the level of the principle of its age, must make *its* idea the guiding idea of society as a whole, and by so doing transform that society after its own image. Workers! This lofty world-historical honor of your calling must fill all your thoughts. Gone for you are the vices of the oppressed, gone the idle amusements of parasites. *You* are the rock on which the church of modernity shall be built!"

And that seemingly icy positivist Marx! Read this line from a recently published letter of his to Meyer, this sigh torn from the great breast of a prophet's loving heart:

> "Why have I not written you? Because I have been at death's door. That compelled me to make use of every moment of capacity for work to complete *the task* to which I have sacrificed my health, my life's happiness, and my family. What more need be explained? I laugh at the so-called practical men and their wisdom. He who wants to live the life of a bull may, of course, turn his back on mankind's suffering and look after his own advantage. But I should have considered it the most 'impractical' thing of all to die without finishing my book—at least in manuscript form."

Those moments are *religious* in which an individual, or a crowd, or a class is lifted high above itself to live across the centuries, to live and die in the brilliance of the future one craves, as soldiers in the single army of *conquest by labor*. We are living in a great epoch; the proletariat is mobilizing immense revolutionary forces. The prophets will appear to continue that long chain of beacons which, stretching from Moses and Zoroaster in a shining procession, have lit the separate stages of our species' arduous journey, and in the distance reveal a majestic rainbow—the gates of the realm of reason, justice, and beauty. Regardless of a prophet's manner of speech, or his superstitions, or his errors, they are all united by a sublime idealism and a fervent love for life and for the truth for which life passionately hungers.

Footnotes

1. Darmsteter, *Les Prophètes*, p. 137. ↩

2. "Otba, son of Rebii," says to Muhammad: "If the spirit that comes to you grips you so strongly and possesses you so that you cannot free yourself from it and therefore go about preaching and sowing discord – then we will send you experienced physicians, we will pay them, and they will cure you."
   This betrays a rather clear consciousness that there is something in common between a sick man and a prophet. To Otba, both the sick man and the prophet are possessed by a spirit, but in the prophet's case, the spirit is good; in the sick man's, it is evil. ↩

---

5) Moral elevation of the gods

Man's covenant with God as an external, tremendous force brings with it much that is irrational—sacrifices, fasts, absurd rites that may at one time have been rational but have lost

their meaning, or that may have arisen from the outset out of some misconception. But over time, God the miracle-worker, the helper in the struggle for existence, recedes into the background, and He increasingly appears as the guardian of the contracts made among men themselves. Clans merge into tribes, tribes into peoples, and a particular divinity becomes the guardian of the social compact and of the gradually unfolding system of laws. The specific traits of a sky-god, sun-god, thunder-god fade away, while the traits of the god of *justice* stand out more prominently. Of course, it is *social* justice—the rule of law in effect for that people. In progressive societies, laws become more rational and assume a constitutional character—that is, they take the form of a covenant not only among the clans and tribes composing it, but also between classes. Strictly speaking, it is less a "covenant" than a compromise—a *modus vivendi*, adopted for the sake of avoiding upheavals and always favorable to the ruling classes, though the other classes accept it as a more bearable condition than the devastation brought by direct insurrection. The gods serve as protectors of this arrangement. They are proclaimed the source and foundation of the state. They stand guard over *morality*—that is, the system of norms that regulate interactions not covered by the law.

Any class struggle that is halfway conscious always takes on the form of a struggle for justice, because justice is the political and economic order that best serves the interests of one class or another. If the aristocracy is in ascendancy, it strives to upset the established order, and it often does so under the banner of *new* gods—for instance, consider the Israelite aristocracy with its fondness for Baal, a "lordly" god of lavish culture. In such cases, the old order and the old god are idealized by the democracy, which labors toward shaping its own concept of justice, and the deity acquires lofty traits of humaneness and egalitarianism. The hesitant or outright hostile stance taken by priests of the old religion—who lack the resolve to side with the oppressed people—brings the people to spurn that cult, favoring a purely moral and social, i.e. a "spiritual," interpretation of the deity.

A rising democracy likewise disrupts established covenants and advances under the banner of *new* gods; the aristocracy then shifts to the defensive, punishing "godlessness." The gods of democracy cast aside the old ways; they appeal to the feelings and reason of the man-worker, grown stronger, and so they always represent a step forward in terms of the deity's spiritual purity, a freedom from obsolete rites and dogmas. Such was the nature of Buddhism and of original Christianity. Yet very frequently, a growing democracy merely purifies the interpretation of old gods, reinterpreting their will. All reform movements took this form. If they went all the way, the break between the old and the new conception of God became so deep that the deity itself split into two gods. In the thirteenth century, the reformers advanced the "Holy Spirit" in opposition to Christ—just as the Christian reform of Judaism only barely concealed the Father-Son antagonism. In the Reformation era associated with Luther, the more radical democratic sects again introduced these two ruptures—some even proclaimed the Jewish Jehovah to be the devil, whereas others rejected Christ for the Holy Spirit, who "bloweth where it listeth." All these phenomena point to the intensification of social struggle.

During its revolutionary phases, democracy contributes most to the moral cleansing and ennobling of the deity. Yahweh and the Christian God—the "Good"—were created by the masses in revolutionary struggles. The people's aspirations to liberty, equality, fraternity, reaching even

to communism, become God's inspirations. God becomes the ideal of social justice. But, naturally, upon the establishment of a new order, even the most revolutionary deity is immediately turned into a conservative or moderate liberal. The new or newly adapted old aristocracy goes to work on the revolutionary god. A conspicuously clear example is found in the ideologues of the Italian monarchy, who strove to domesticate and render "constitutional" Mazzini's God, the god of Italy's most recent democratic revolution. The primary concern of those who adapt revolutionary deities is to *metaphysicize* the ideal borne by the people's god, replacing terrestrial justice with justice in heaven. Simple and convenient! The deity does not sink in moral stature, but quietly reconciles itself with earthly injustices: Justice becomes the crown bestowed on one who, with humility, bears the yoke of injustice through his brief earthly life. Thus God's moral loftiness itself becomes a weapon in the hands of exploiters and swindlers.

As for the transition from polytheism to monotheism, in truth only monotheists themselves can revere this development. Monarchy—along with the merging of peoples into a single state, and of states into a global society—leads to monotheism. A tangled syncretism—a crowded bazaar of the world's gods, jostling and knocking each other aside—on one hand; and on the other, the work of reflection that strives to reconcile this chaos with the relative unity of society and nature that expanded experience is establishing—these are the roots of monotheism. One must add as well the natural inclination of thinking persons toward philosophical monism, and the national pride that aspires to proclaim its tribal deity the "god above all gods." By a remarkable convergence of historical circumstances, the Jewish national god arrived on the world stage at precisely the right time, adopting the form of a democratic deity and protector of the oppressed. For us, in recounting this process (which we will describe in more detail), it is far more significant that the "one god" possessed those traits than that he was "one." All the more so since his unity did not last that long.

Scientific monism in studying nature is equally close to—and equally distant from—both monotheism and polytheism. Polytheism easily transitions into pantheism; when nature is seen as a host of spirits and gods, one quickly adds the notion of a Fate looming over the existence and mutual conflicts of these anthropomorphized natural forces—a notion of eternal necessity. This worldview offers just as natural a passage to scientific monism (the concept of the world as unity in infinite diversity) as monotheism does, viewing the unified world as the creation of a single God. This one God is later identified by scientific thought with the totality of natural laws—and then is swallowed up and dissolved into the world as its immanent order.

Scientific monism is equally remote from both mono- and polytheism, given that any mysterious concept is alien to it. Even pantheism, *if* it attributes moral, humanlike traits to the cosmic order—if it tries to represent that order as a moral order—differs *toto caelo* from scientific monism. The idea of a pitiless Fate, or the deist concept of God as the physical architect of the cosmic mechanism who withdraws once the construction is complete, stands closer to science than does such pantheism. Hence, from the vantage point of science, monotheism is by no means a step forward—and neither is it a step forward in the moral sense.

Monotheism makes *one* God solely responsible for the entire world, and hence for the undeniably existing evil in it. This has hopelessly entangled religious thought. People have repeatedly circled back to dualism—whether in the form of a "black" god opposing a "white" god, or in the form of a "malevolent will" in man's free spirit. All such attempts are curtailments of absolute monotheism; for a pure monotheism, the highest human morality is utterly irreconcilable.

6) Religious Contradiction and Its Application

In **monotheism**, the inner contradiction of every moralizing theology becomes especially obvious. God is the absolute Good and absolute Power, and yet evil exists. This is the nonsensical aspect of theism, the source of meaningless "theodicies."[1]

To escape from it, one must inevitably retreat in moral terms. Morality has developed the notion of the absolute Good, that is, an internally harmonious ideal of life, entirely distinct from evil as disharmony, malice, and suffering. Man's thirst for the triumph of justice compelled him to proclaim his postulate—his dream, his program of good and perfection—proclaim it the ruler of the world. Only certainty in the absolute might of this absolute Good gave man a chance to remain proudly devoted to it and to hold an unshakable hope in its victory amid the bitter vicissitudes of history.

But if Good is almighty—where does evil come from? This makes it necessary yet again to muddy those clear, hard-earned abstract concepts of good and evil. Either Good ceases to be good in nature, or evil is not really so dark after all. God is good, but in His own way, not a human one. The world is good; if it seems bad to us, that is because it must be good in God's eyes, not at all in the eyes of limited men. But under this conception, goodness and love are replaced by mystery and caprice; moral critique dies out, giving place to fatalism. The triumph of that principle, which kills culture, thought, and true feeling, is what we see in Islam: "Thus God wills."

We regress into the depths of servitude. God becomes almost evil. Only shifting retribution, the restoration of justice, into the next life still keeps God's goodness afloat. But what a pitiful outcome! First, the idea of rewarding men with paradise for life's agonizing comedy—complete with the existence of hell for the bad actors—outrages a highly developed sense of fairness; suffering is not undone by subsequent bliss. Given belief in an omnipotent God, it remains but a

needless mockery.[2] Second, shifting the center of gravity from this life to some fantastical afterlife justifies far too much. It kills all outrage, all protest; it annihilates all interest in life, making religion into a force for conservatism, one deeply hostile to progress.

Seeking to preserve God's omnipotence, metaphysicians have allowed that within Him there lurks a dark principle that the principle of light will, however, overcome. But such a deity, ceasing to be wholly good, simultaneously forfeits its omnipotence: it becomes an imitation of man—yet not of man in moments of strength or harmony, but of man torn by internal dissension and disintegrating will. This conception morally degrades the deity, making it not the highest pinnacle of light, love, and truth, but rather the tremendous shadow of a man at war with himself. And the guarantee of victory disappears. If in infinite time, the eternal God has not yet conquered the evil or dark principle in Himself, then why should we expect that He will ever attain the full radiance of light?

John Stuart Mill suggested saving God's absolute goodness at the cost of His omnipotence. Then God becomes Good in its struggle against Evil—an overt dualism.

Beyond corrupting the concept of the absolute, integral, pure Good, metaphysicians trying to preserve monotheism also resort to muddling the concept of evil. Evil is not evil, but a form of the good. It is needed the way shadow is needed to highlight light, or as a school of purification, or as a subject of struggle that tempers moral energy, and so on.

All that is a moral fall from the heights of absolute moral monotheism. Why is shadow required to highlight light? We know what this shadow is: it is suffering, sickness, and death; oppression, malice, executions, tortures; it is an ocean of indescribable agony flooding the history of our species and of all life. To say that all of this is necessary just to let the adjacent Good shine all the brighter means that, instead of settling the religious question—the question of happiness, perfection, and harmony of life—we simply sweep it away. It amounts to calling the world the best of all possible worlds, in defiance of man's impassioned cry: "I do not accept this world."

A "purification school," a tempering of energy? Then why did God not create everything from the start in a purified and tempered state? We will not forgive Him the rivers of tears and blood, no matter where He leads us.

A grand trick was the teaching that God Himself suffers together with you.
For what purpose? If He is omnipotent, it is some sort of sport, because He could have reached His goal without suffering, by a single movement of His boundless will. If He can only reach His foreordained goal at the cost of real suffering, then He is not almighty, for that is precisely the essence of "non-omnipotence"—that the objective cannot be attained without pain or struggle.

And once again, people revert from omnipotence back to mere "sufficient might." Good is strong enough to prevail, but only through conflict.

Let it be a dualism in which light dominates darkness. The question remains: if Good is the stronger, why has it not triumphed over billions of ages, over an infinite past?

And one must either stand there, dull-witted, before the darkness of the world's origins, before the struggle and the progress or the gods themselves coming from something else or from nothing, or else accept an Empedoclean cycle: an eternal ascent to the heights of light followed by a new, headlong plunge into the abyss of gloom. And that is the ultimate dualism, unlit by any ray of hope.

Why does human thought keep hammering in vain? The reason is easy to grasp: we are given the real terms of a dilemma. Man contends for his ideals against forces and obstacles that bar his way. There is the undeniable dualism of life. But the life instinct craves certainty of victory. From that arises the idea of the absolute might of Good. Religious certainty about victory is in sharp conflict with the protracted and painful struggle. The religious contradiction is a longing for certainty in victory, which cannot be had, for that certainty is granted only by an actual victory. Hence one contrives a sort of victory of Good that coexists with the ongoing conflict. A mind grown logical, and a proud heart that will not tolerate anyone's tyranny or arbitrary power, can preserve religion only by exchanging the craving for certainty for *hope*—and by making a tragic affirmation of life as a task, fraught with all its trials and misgivings.

Footnotes

1. *Bogopravdanii* (theodicies). ↩

2. Cf. the conversation between Ivan Karamazov and Alyosha; nothing more thoroughly demolishes the usual defenses of God's ways. ↩

7) Theory of Atonement

By becoming guardians of social justice, the gods—originally ferociously elemental— themselves grow increasingly just. In the end, they are transformed into a perfect and benevolent world-governance. Polytheism either becomes hierarchized and acquires a monarch, or else it cedes its place to monotheism.

The joyful and soul-exalting notion of the gods—or of God—as the best, most worthy, highest being that a given people at a given time can conceive, the **ideal beauty** of the deity, must not and cannot be sullied by responsibility for the evil and horror of life. "God is just"—this is the fervent postulate of a human being who has fallen in love with *himself* in the person of his god, his own enlightened reflection in the mirror-like heaven of imagination. If man suffers despite God's justice, then *man himself* is to blame. It is better to accuse oneself as a real human being than to accuse God—humanity's *ideal* self. Even the kindliest ruler, even the most perfect

republic, inflicts suffering as punishment for misdeeds and crimes. And so: the evils of life, the sufferings of this world—these are *penalties* for sin.

Realistic Judaism, upon observing that even infants—too young to have committed any sin—do nonetheless suffer and die, easily adopted the notion of guilt for their parents' sins. Two circumstances lent particular support to this idea: the undeniable fact of heredity and degeneration, and the clan's [or family's] collective liability for an individual's wrongdoing. Already in ancient times, the clan, and later the family, bore accountability for the deeds of its members. An individual was still not regarded separately, as an independent agent. And in fact, nature bound that individual firmly to his ancestors and descendants by the powerful law of heredity. So we inherit sin. We bear the crimes of our fathers, and we pile fresh "shameful deeds" atop them, for from the source we were already tainted—our bodies are corrupt; we are fallen beings. The first man and the first woman committed the first dreadful sin.[1]

Even bolder and more beautiful is the notion of fallen angels, those pure and lovely spirits who, for their offenses, have been locked into human bodies subject to anguish. The Earth becomes the angels' hell; the bodily human is the prison of an angel punished by the Lord for a transgression in His presence.

On top of the burdens of suffering and misfortune, on top of remorse for one's own misdeeds in the face of conscience, of fellow citizens, and of the governing authorities, came the awareness of the inherent sinfulness of the world. A vast, grim shadow of sin, self-humiliation, and shame fell across humanity's face; yet the higher rose the mountaintops receding into heaven, for it was by that price that the unsullied justice of the deities was purchased.

Moreover, along with the doctrine of man's fundamental sinfulness, all the limitations of life—man's inadequate command over the elements, his fragility and ill health, his inertia and poverty—were also accorded an entirely moral character. All physical misfortunes were cast as punishments; and if so, then *all* of them would cease, and life would become pure joy—earth a paradise—as soon as sin was atoned for. Attempts to create rites of atonement soon led to disillusionment. No religion could, of course, invent any form of atonement that actually ended evil. One had to shift one's hopes to the future. Some day there would occur an act of atonement, an act reconciling man to God and bringing about the end of evil. Thus messianism was born. Occasionally a historical event—the appearance of a great and devout king or an outstanding prophet—would be acknowledged by a longing, salvation-hungry humanity as the advent of the kingdom of peace, goodness, and justice. Yet fresh disappointment would follow. The supposed messiah was relegated to a forerunner; or the hopes associated with him were transferred to his second coming. We shall speak in later chapters of specific forms of messianism—Persian, Jewish, Greek, Buddhist.

For now let us note only this: Humanity created a radiant god of strength, beauty, wisdom, and righteousness. By so doing, it essentially exalted *itself* to an ideal; it perceived itself in its embryonic grandeur, and in a great theological myth expressed life's aspiration to a triumphant fullness, harmony, absolutely victorious might, and eternity. Yet not all of humanity's precious and splendid content was included in that clarified self-portrait. In such a god, there is no place for suffering. To make the world's king and judge—the ideal of power and happiness—undergo

suffering would be to mar the glory of victory, foreseen and mythically savored in advance. Meanwhile, man had reached a certain level of maturity where he recognized the worth of suffering, specifically *innocent* and *purposeful* suffering. Is not the capacity for self-sacrifice divine in man? The capacity of a hero to live and die for his people, of a mother to do likewise for her child. Two monumental sorrows lifted humanity's eyes toward heaven: a mother's sorrow for her child and a hero's sorrow for his people, suffering for his kin. Humanity bowed before a mother's sacrifice and a hero's sacrifice. If humanity is ever to be forgiven, it will be for these two grand sacrifices. The Guardian of the species, the Great Mother in general—who in pains and anguish gives birth to life and protects it, weeping over its suffering and defending its rights—and the hero who, though innocent, takes on the burden of guilt, the hero who embraces a mortal deed—these are humankind's intercessors before the supreme gods. They are, as one might say, the credentials written in nerve and blood that bear witness to man's divinity and permit him to face the ideal or sun-like apex of man's exalted humanity without flinching.

Osiris, Vishnu, Buddha, Adonis, Zagreus, Prometheus, Heracles, Balder, Christ, Ali, Isis, *Da Mater, Bogoroditsa* ("Mother of God"), Fatima, etc.—these are symbols of mankind in its atoning, innocent, and self-sacrificing suffering. And humanity boldly proclaimed that suffering heroism, too, is God. It seated its loving anguish, its torment of love, at God's side, on the right hand of omnipotence.

But in so doing, in its own eyes humanity drained its own soul of everything. It had exalted all its best qualities into heaven, leaving nothing behind on earth. Redeeming heroism was thus turned into a visitor from the skies, an arm stretched down from heaven, instead of an upsurge from earth toward heaven.

Wherever the Redeemer remained a hero, he would begin to surpass God and reproach Him for injustice and cruelty. Wherever he became God Himself, the tragedy of redemption threatened to degenerate into a monstrous tragicomedy—God quelling His own anger through His own sufferings, God pardoning humanity for His own merits, God offering up His only-begotten Son as a sacrifice. The marvelous myth of the highest life, conceived during a struggle for perfection, was deformed by contact with theological logic, descending into a tangled, impenetrable dogma.

Meanwhile, the logic of common sense drove forward the logic of theology. Man continued to elevate his God. If it be absolute, let it be absolute. Before God's dazzling perfection, everything else vanished; nature itself became the work of His hands, and the religious contradiction started to strike the eye. The Apostle Paul rhapsodizes in his *Epistle to the Romans*:

> "For the scripture says to Pharaoh: 'For this very reason I raised thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whom he wills, and he hardens whom he wills."
>
> But immediately the question arises: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'"

What could the theologian answer? "But who are you, O man, to dispute with God? Shall the thing that is made say to him who made it, 'Why have you made me thus?' Is the potter not

master over the clay, to shape from the same clay one vessel for honorable use and another for a base one?"

Will such an answer satisfy the proud heart of modern man? Where is your justice, O God? Once again, you regress into a capricious tyrant!

Monarchy, with all its arbitrariness, flattery, and ban on reflection, has smeared the face of the Deity. Instead of the ideal Father, we find the King at every turn. But *God the Father* is unthinkable, given a world lying in evil; *God the King* is unacceptable to a conscience that has grown up.

"Gods are man's own feelings, which people projected onto nature. Once man realized that nature does not share his feelings, the gods perished. But their death is a sign that mankind has no further need of them." So says the Belgian poet Verhaeren. His words are profound. Humanity struggles within the mesh of its theological puzzle as long as it needs the gods, seeking a way out, on the verge of despair, crying: *Credo quia absurdum* ("I believe because it is absurd"). If God is lost prematurely, the heart bleeds. A marvelous example of poetry born of grief over a prematurely deceased God is found in Lenau's poems and letters.[2]

But at last, humanity is able to let the gods depart in peace. They have served their time.

Footnotes

1. "Original Sin" in nearly all peoples takes the form of a restless reaching after something better, which offends the gods. We shall return to this point later. ↩

2. I have translated his "Faust" and in the preface provided a summary and analysis of his religious-philosophical poems. *Faust* by Nikolaus Lenau, published by *Obrazovanie*. ↩

8) Götterdämmerung. The Second Solution to the Religious Problem

The chief reason for the death of the gods is the growing self-confidence of man in the face of nature. The victory of thought alone is not sufficient to secure the final defeat of superstition. What of it if the thinking of Democritus conceives a world without a creator and natural phenomena without hidden spirits behind them? What if Epicurus lays the foundations of a

purely human morality, reducing it to a set of rules for the happiest personal life? What if Lucretius conquers his fear of death and utters those great words:

> **Nec pietas ulla est velatum saepe videri**
> **Vorti ad Cupidem, at que omnes accedere ad aras—**
> **Sed mage faculta posse omnia mente tueri**?[1]

These lofty ideas remained the property of a handful of philosophers. During the lives of these wise men, superstitions raged, and after their deaths humankind still had to submerge itself entirely in a life-negating mysticism. Only labor, together with a philosophy of labor—that is, natural science—destroys the age-old edifice for good, since they simultaneously demonstrate its logical fragility, its contradiction of facts, and its *uselessness,* which is paramount. *Ever-growing human labor*—primarily industrial, urban labor—teaches man about the lawfulness of nature. It is not the cryptic cyclical phenomena recorded by astronomers and farmers, but rather the *mechanical* lawfulness. Workshop tools, strictly calculated work processes, and the always precisely foreseeable result—these guarantee a mechanical worldview. *The world is a mechanism*. Such is the great discovery of craft labor, renewed time and again in the words of Leucippus, Democritus, Lucretius; and even more firmly expressed in proportion to the revival and growth of manufactures and factories—Gassendi, Descartes, La Mettrie, Holbach, and, in modern times, the philosophy of energy in the new materialism.

But the "mechanism" that is divorced from labor carries something disheartening within it. "The world is a mechanism—what good is that?" says the poet. "The heavenly king has been dethroned, the thrones of the earth tremble, the world has become a republic; the hierarchy has been uprooted at its core, and the dread of the supernatural that held humanity in chains has dispersed like smoke!" exults the materialist ideologue. "It has grown drab, dull, rigid, cold," the poet says. "It has become frightening, meaningless. Here we stand with our mind, living in the jaws of a soulless devil, which will crush us with its indestructible teeth and indifferently decompose our thought, our beauty, our love, and our ideal in its fiery belly into chemical elements. Terrible!" the idealist says.

But *labor* shows no fear. Conjoined with labor, the "mechanism" takes on an entirely different character. Thus, the world is lawful. One can foresee, nothing is hidden. If one relies on knowledge, one can act with confidence. Does not the discovery of the laws of the mechanism imply the ability to *control* it?

Where the contemplative type perceived despair, the *active* and *economic* type foresaw his future kingdom. "If there is no God," he said, "then I can become one." "The elements are powerful, but they are slaves to necessity. I am small but rational. I shall conquer space and time, making swift-flying electricity my Mercury, my charioteer. Vulcan and Neptune shall be my workers. I shall win and organize the earth; and, who knows, I may reach out my hand to the moon as well… Then—if I can send my word across the watery ocean, why not master the ocean of the ether? Anything is possible for labor armed with knowledge."

Such jubilation already rings through the pages of Bacon's *The New Atlantis*. But a new foe lay in wait for mankind. The advance of man's sovereign power, his creation of steel slaves huffing

steam and animated by electricity, was attended by the enslavement and impoverishment of millions of people. Greed, relentless exploitation of man by man, ruthless adversity, ruinous competition, the all-powerful and faceless stock exchange, the ascendancy of cotton, coal, and steel—and, above them all, gold, enthroned over man—nearly snuffed out the joyous impetus of Moro, Bacon, and Condorcet.

Yet Saint-Simon still calls us forward, loud and glad—a giant of thought, a great prophet before mankind. At the outcry of bourgeois economists, at the imprecations hurled at capital, he replies with a grand solution: *Organize!* Suffering comes from individualism, private property, a fragmented economy, self-centered aims. The task of industry, agriculture, and commerce—the practical economic task of mankind—is to unite its forces in brotherhood. And Saint-Simon boldly called that commercial-industrial task a *religious* one. But it was already the dawn of a religion *without God*.

Labor grows apace. Science and technology grow with it, embodying knowledge of nature's lawfulness and the practical use of that knowledge. *Socialism* grows along with it—the understanding that man must organize his collective strength for further victories and progress. The secrets of social chaos are exposed. The old, fallacious methods—appealing to enlightened monarchs and millionaires, conspiratorial revolts to seize power, the creation of idealistic little communes—are abandoned. The enemy is laid bare; the fighter is armed; the true representative of labor, labor incarnate—the proletariat of all nations—has taken up the banner of the ideal. With its triumph, the gods will die once and for all, and man will ascend to Olympus to dictate laws to the world. Redemption will reveal its secret: *it is the secret of labor* and of labor's international, classless organization.

In a public debate, the writer of these lines faced, as an opponent, a leading representative of progressive clergy. In an exceedingly vivid, richly expressive speech, that clergyman laid out his ideas about the significance of religion for humanity. He concluded roughly as follows:

> "Human life appears to me as a vast chamber, into which air, warmth, and light pour through several windows: the window of science, the window of philosophy, the window of art, and the window of religion. Some people want to board up that last window. But I say: Leave it. The more light, warmth, and free-flowing air rush into our chamber, the easier it is to breathe, the happier it is to live.
>
> They retort: Do you not sense that from that fourth window, no fragrance of garden or sea is wafting, but rather a poisonous spirit seeps in?—Yes, I answer, but look: there lies carrion, decaying at the window. Remove it and again the healthy air will stream through. That carrion is the slavish subservience of churchliness, the dominion of policemanlike religiosity, the reign of deadening forms, the abasement of the church before oppressors, all the filth of official corruption accumulated over centuries. Clear it away—but do not board up the window."

While replying to my opponent, I said among other things:

> "I, too, want all four windows, and I, too, want to help remove the corpse whose dead bulk obstructs that fourth window. But with my respected opponent's kind permission, I shall voice a thought that may well shock him, which may sound too audacious to his ears but is true for me: He has misidentified that great dead one. He has listed the worms crawling over it: that is the dead god lying by the window of religion. *It is the deity-idea that must be cleared away* so that we may see, through those windows, the shining horizons of progress and the sun of a pure ideal. We are practically in agreement about religion's influence as a system of feelings that lifts man above his everyday level, above self-interest, trivial calculations, loneliness, and cowardice—onto that plateau swept by the wind of freedom, where hearts beat in unison, where they strive upward and onward, where the wings of creative dreaming sprout, and where arms strengthen like steel to achieve greatness. But we are irreconcilably divided in one essential, central matter: I do not accept God. He is not needed; on the contrary, this illusion is harmful. All the loftiness of religion remains, but the world is no longer a tyranny, nor is it even that enlightened monarchy it is so stubbornly taken to be, despite all man's misery. Humanity is left to itself. Man is a god to man. Let us have no other gods, let us not bow down to them or serve them."

Taking the floor again, my opponent declared that he did not care "to use his walking-stick to brace Mont Blanc," that "they have talked a great deal about God's death, but He is quite alive," and that "long after we are gone, God will still be living."

The priest did well not to shore up Mont Blanc with a stick: undoubtedly, the stick would have snapped under the fatal collapse of Mont Blanc. And collapse it will.

As for citing the longevity of God, that is unconvincing. People have opposed private property for at least as long as it has existed—yet it still binds humanity with tight knots. But our honorable opponent apparently has no inclination to draw from this the inference of its eternal necessity. We have already noted the forces undermining faith in the deity. There are, however, contrary forces that preserve it: the technological backwardness of the countryside, the farmer's extreme dependence on the weather in the face of underdeveloped meteorological science and—far less—its practical application. But as machine-based agriculture develops, along with the rigorous chemical fertilizing of fields, irrigation systems, and—very possibly—the art of invoking or halting rain, snow, and hail (some artillery experiments in this direction have already been made), or else fully neutralizing the harmful effects of irregular precipitation, even the farmer will be freed from nature's fickle ways, becoming *truly* the master of his production. A broad wave of culture that will wash away the rustic darkness will finish the rest.

Another fortress of God-religion is *woman,* for so long confined to a closed-off life and ignorance, finding her joy and spiritual elevation only in the unhealthy atmosphere of church and confessional. She will be won over by the new culture even more easily. Only the vile desire of the bourgeoisie to keep woman in ignorance and superstition—so as to possess her as a slave—and the shameful indifference of most proletarians to the way their wives think, enable

the clergy to keep women's souls in their clutches, despite the fact that these souls yearn for poetry, standing ready to open themselves wide to meet the new religion.

But the most significant reason for mysticism's resilience is the disorganized economy of society: it strikes farmer and petty merchant and artisan alike; it creates the storms of fate for the middle, intermediate class; it rules even the major bourgeoisie; and the proletariat itself barely overcomes it, relying on a clear understanding of the *real* sources of that dark "accident," fate, destiny, etc., which wreaks large and small catastrophes in the ocean of social life.

Paul Lafargue explains admirably the persistence of religion—this is the spontaneity of social phenomena, not yet understood or managed by man. I shall borrow from him this characterization of the bourgeoisie's social mysticism:

> "In economic life, the bourgeois encounters only inexplicable mysteries which economists have resigned themselves to thinking insoluble. The capitalist, who thanks to his scientists has learned to harness the forces of nature, sees the incomprehensible workings of economic forces with such dread that he deems them beyond investigation, just like his God; and the most prudent course he can imagine is to submit to misfortune if it befalls him and accept good fortune gratefully if it comes. He, like Job, says: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.' In his fancy, economic forces appear as benign or malign genies. Terrifying uncertainty in the social realm, which he cannot grasp—why or how things happen—pervades his industry, his trade, his property, prosperity, and life. It frightens him no less than the savage was once frightened by nature's hidden ways, which stirred up his heated imagination. Anthropologists ascribe the savage's belief in witches, his belief in souls, spirits, and gods, to his ignorance of nature; the same explanation applies to civilized man, whose spiritualistic ideas and faith in God derive from his ignorance of the social world.
>
> The bourgeois, never sure how long his prosperity will last, acknowledges the existence of higher beings governing social phenomena at will—favorable or unfavorable, just as Theognis and the Old Testament describe. Seeking their favor, he plunges into the grossest superstition: he lights candles before the images of saints and prays to the Christian triune God, or the one God of philosophers."

Within the proletariat, a number of factors create fertile soil for unbelief and for a firmly realistic worldview. Lafargue says:

> "Working in the shop with machines places the laborer face to face with forces of nature so vast and frightful that the peasant has no concept of them; yet it is not *they* who rule over him—on the contrary, *he* governs them. The giant contrivance of steel and iron that fills the factory, sets it in motion like an automaton, sometimes devours him, mangles him, crushes him—does not instill him with superstitious horror, as thunder might in a peasant; it does not move or terrify him, because he knows that the parts of this metal monster were made and put together by his

> comrades, that he has only to shift a belt in order to set it in motion or stop it. For all its power and wonderful productive capabilities, to him it holds no mystery.
>
> The worker in an electrical station who needs only to flick a switch to power distant streetcars or light a city's streets can say, like God in the first book of Moses: 'Let there be light!' and there is light. He never thought of this as *magical sorcery,* for him it is altogether simple and ordinary. He would be deeply astonished if someone told him that God might, if He wished, stop the machines or turn off the lights. He would reply that this 'anarchist' God is but a broken part in the machine or a severed wire. Practical labor in the modern shop teaches the worker scientific determinism, even though he has not formally studied philosophy."

Marx, in the first volume of *Capital,* sketches—briefly and in passing, but with brilliant clarity—a depiction of religion's evolution in humanity:

> "The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. For that society in which the product of labor commonly assumes the form of a commodity, in which, consequently, the most ordinary relation between producers is comparing the values of their products, under the guise of comparing things, and thus converting their private, individualized labor into measured portions of homogenous human labor—for that society, Christianity, with its cult of abstract man, especially in its bourgeois development of Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most appropriate form of religion. In the ancient Asiatic and other such modes of production, the conversion of products into commodities, i.e. into the products of commodity-producers, plays a subordinate part, which indeed grows in importance the more communal production approaches its dissolution.
>
> True merchant nations exist only in the interstices of the world, like Epicurus's gods or the Jews in the pores of Polish society. Those older social production organizations, incomparably simpler and clearer than bourgeois society, are based either on the underdevelopment of the individual man, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord attaching him by natural bonds to the rest of the community, or on direct relationships of dominance and subordination. They come into being, and endure, only where the productive forces of labor are still on a very low stage of development, where, therefore, the social relations in material life, both among men and in man's relation to nature, necessarily remain quite restricted.
>
> This limitation is ideally reflected in the old worship of nature and other forms of folk belief. The religious reflex of the real world can vanish only when the conditions of practical life and labor present man with relationships that are transparent and rational, and the mysterious fog enshrouding the world dissolves only once life becomes the work of a freely associated humanity, acting consciously according to a settled plan. Yet to achieve this, society requires a certain material foundation—a totality of concrete conditions of existence, themselves the product of a long, painful process of development."

Grown labor—this is the slayer of gods. But it is also the creator of a new religion, because its aim is the conquest of nature, the removal of evil, the triumph of reason over the elemental—a perpetually growing power, an unceasing perfection of the species, that is, the fulfillment of man's age-old desires. And all of it is to be accomplished through an organization that binds individuals, uniting them across space and time, making the Chinese man and the Frenchman brothers and co-workers, linking the man of the twentieth century and the bright descendant of the thirtieth. And the new religion still calls for self-sacrifice, but only *voluntary* self-sacrifice. It wants *mercy*, not slaughter; it wants a devoted love for the species. And who, if not the proletarian—reared in broad cooperation, who can hope to succeed only on the basis of broad international coalitions—who if not he can become the standard-bearer of the new religion?

Reconciliation of the laws of life and the laws of nature will be achieved by the victory of life through knowledge and technology. Labor, broad community, a developed sense of species, confidence in unbroken progress—this is the religious consolation of our epoch. Such is the second solution to the religious problem. If there is any god here, it is *Life* and its highest representative, the human species. Devotion to science, labor—and, for our time, the struggle for socialism, the all-round campaign that dismantles both the old social order and the old order of the soul, building a new society and a new soul—this is the religious task of the new man.

Footnotes

1. *There is no piety in often appearing veiled, bowing before the statue of Cupido, or in crowding around all the altars; rather, piety lies far more in being able to look at all things with a mind clear and free.* (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*) ↩

9) Mythology of labor

The noted scholar of the history of religion, Darmesteter, says in his book *The Prophets of Israel*:

> "On eternal Olympus, only the dead live; gods become infinitely beneficent only after passing through the flames of Hades. A god who appears with his retinue of priests, in the glory of his cult, is always an ambiguous despot, equally mighty for good or ill. But death for the gods of heaven and earth separates the chaff and leaves the eternal grain. Homer's gods were a scandalous example to believing Greeks; for us, they are eternal teachers of beauty and joy, a distant glimmer of their aura shining in our souls. So too with Jesus, a hapless god, betrayed before and after the cross, who wished the world so much good and caused so much harm—he will enter

> his epiphany only on that day when, in some remote village of Salzburg or Navarre, the last priest finishes the last mass."[1]

The beauty of dead religions is great. Looking into the essence of their myths and dogmas, into their human essence, one marvels at the prescience of its destiny shown by still intellectually immature mankind in creating them. In strange garb, there appears to us that same one and only human religion, which now finds its expression not in idealistic philosophy as Hegel believed, but in scientific socialism. And *not* as an absolute sealing history off, but quite the opposite—*opening* a new era, finally initiating mankind, after its long and painful prologue, into the Divine Comedy of reason's victory over the once-deified elements.

But those paradoxical veils in which an infantile mind once shrouded the living religious instinct are often wondrously beautiful, and many—even a great many—myths of old religions can, I think, enter into the poetry of this new religion of labor, receiving fresh meaning there. What could be lovelier, for example, than the strange conjectures of the earliest poets about the origin of sin? Yes, original sin was dreamed up to justify God. But between the lines of these pious legends, man's bold thought hurls a rebuke and a challenge at divinity.

To the tyrannical Fate personified by Zeus—prepared to annihilate the human race, wretched in his eyes, without so much as a shake of his mighty locks or a furrow of his Olympian brow—there stands opposed another, purely human deity, *Prometheus*. God-as-Universe and God-as-Man face each other. If you are so beautiful, Jupiter, and such order reigns on your pink-and-white Olympus, and the children of Chaos are driven so far into the dark, is it not Prometheus—human knowledge—who created you? The sun's rays pierce the gloom with their arrows, but is it not dead without the beams of *reason,* that sun that illuminates the cosmos by thought? The divine realm knows not its debt to reason, and is ready to destroy the wretched two-legged race. Only their brother, their leader, Prometheus, took pity on them and defended them. He is cognition and rational labor, granting them the power to subdue the primordial element—fire—and opening up distant roads for technology. In the legend, the conquest of fire provokes the wrath of the gods; we sense that this mastery of fire will one day bring down their divinity. He taught men farming, industry, social contracts. Seeing that they were mortal, he gave them, according to Aeschylus, "blind hope"—that is, the courage to live and fight without any certainty of victory, that hope, that boldness to carry the torch into the eternal dark, forward and onward, which is the very essence of the new religious feeling. Outraged, the Element destroys Reason; it fastens him to the rock of lifeless matter, thrusting endless torments upon him. But he stands proud. He knows the gods' secret: The gods must perish. Someone stronger than Zeus shall come. Who is it? It is Man-as-Worker, *Heracles*—he will break the chains of reason. Martyr-seers, prophets, teachers, and genius-sufferers will descend from the ledges of that rocky torment, their prison, where with eyes undimmed by trials they have measured the misty distances and pierced the gloom—descend, leaning on the mighty arm of Man-the-Doer, and Thought and Labor, Foresight and Deed, crowned with laurel and oak, will ascend Olympus together, not as those reconciled with Zeus (that reconciliation being mere pious cowardice, all-too-human fear), but as *victors*.

Nietzsche strove in vain, beside the greatness of Prometheus's sin, to belittle the greatness of Adam's sin, or rather that of Lucifer.

However the biblical poet may cower before Elohim, or however slavishly he may kiss His hand, he weaves into the account of the first sin a certain thread of satanic rebellion—as if with some cunning genius.

The elemental God wants dominion over man, wants to hear only praise on his lips. So man must not come to know, must not distinguish good from evil. Did not God, having created the world, say "All is very good"?

And suddenly, the worm He Himself fashioned begins to criticize the Great Maker. Indeed, it is the eternal critique, the light-bearing force of reason, that drives Adam and Eve to the forbidden fruit. Then they taste it. In terror, the Elohim gather their council: "If man retains immortality alongside knowledge—our end has come. Truly, men will be like gods," for that stealthy hope of rivaling the elements did not lie. And so the sentence falls on man: banishment into inhospitable lands, penal servitude, disease, and death. He kisses the punishing fist, the whistling lash, and curses the Tempter; trembling, he whispers to his own reason, "Be still!" But the rebellion pursues its course. The Cainites serve the Light-Bearer. Their descendants will begin constructing the eternal tower of culture in proud Babylon—the city of them all, passionate, suffering, colossal, the City-of-all-mankind!—And terror and confusion again spread across the heavens.

If Adam was punished by being exiled to forced labor, they now provoke him further: they sow discord among men, dividing them into nations. What a deep insight into the root of man's weakness: improve labor's technique so that bread need not be kneaded with the sweat of the brow, conquer disease, and, above all, *unite* all mankind as one—then paradise will be snatched back, and heaven itself will be stormed, the curse of the Elohim will lose its power. For ages on end, men will read with trembling these sly, seemingly submissive pages, men who are Cainites, and, where Seth's line heaves a penitent sigh, the Cainite will fall into reverie, his heart pounding with anxious joy, his mind aflame, as the breath of the Light-Bearer—the Great Slandered One, the spirit of revolt, critique, and knowledge, the Architect of the Babel tower—passes overhead and stirs the hair of his defiant head.

In his *Thaïs*, Anatole France reports that at the very time Christianity was first achieving success and the gods of Olympus were fading, a number of pagans expected a change of rulers on Olympus; a rumor spread that, according to Prometheus's genuine prophecy, Jupiter would have to yield his throne to his son Heracles, the deified man. With his reign, justice would rule.

Heracles is the god of labor. Only the working peoples, the active classes, could conceive in their fantasy this man-god. By then the human intellect had glimpsed the might of labor and its grand horizons. Meanwhile, amid the elemental gods, there was one supremely suited to represent deified labor: *the sun-god*. The sun might be worshiped in many ways: as bringer of light and symbol of culture's battle against barbaric darkness; as a source of heat—sometimes beneficial, sometimes lethal; as the world's great male who fertilizes the earth. Its daily path across the sky—sunrise, zenith, sunset; its fight with clouds; its force steadily mounting from winter to

summer, then declining—these provided a rich fare for myth-making. Man perceived that the sun was the great wellspring of energy, that it ceaselessly caused change in nature, and thus understood it as a laborer. Alongside bright Apollo, Baal glowing with passion, the mysterious Osiris dying to be reborn, we find solar deities actively redeeming humankind, laboring for them, such as Mithra and especially Vishnu.

All the same, Greek genius surpassed the grandeur of all solar myths, assembling them into a distinctively lovely bouquet around Heracles, whom it—following a profound instinct—transformed from a god into a human hero.

He was born on Earth. *Labor* at once meets hostility: the serpents of the elements want to kill him as he lies helpless in his infant cradle, but the child-Labor manages to strangle them in his first flush of still-weak muscles. A young Labor merits a royal crown and has every claim to it, yet false kings do him violence and trick him. A difficult road lies ahead, from deed to deed. He battles wild beasts, driving them back from man bit by bit; he likewise battles the greedy elements, draining swamps and turning them into farmland and gardens. He cleanses the moral and material filth in man's settlements (the Augean stables). Enemies increase. For each head cut from the Hydra of evil, two new ones appear, hissing with hatred and spewing fiery malice. But the hero never wearies. He rescues Reason—powerful by its clairvoyance but weak in battle—groaning in its chains. He challenges Death to a duel. He descends into the nether reaches of Tartarus to lead away the watch-dog of the realm of death, Cerberus, and on the tombs of those dear to him he fights Thanatos himself, wrenching his victims right from the jaws of death.

And he *suffers*. He suffers humiliations, hostility, treachery. He is snared in poisoned garments, which bind him more tightly than any chain—a chain he would have torn, but the venomous cloak devours his flesh, withers his blood. He cannot endure that garment of bondage on his body: he prefers dying in fire to suffering slow torture. Yet like a Phoenix, from the blaze of mortal struggle he emerges into a new life, emerges the victor, a god, and youthful Hebe hands him the goblet of everlasting joy, of eternal freshness, and becomes his bride.

Perhaps all these details can be explained as myths arising from solar phenomena; but do they not harbor profound awareness of labor's might, labor's regal nature, awareness of its destiny of suffering, the necessity for it to fling itself willingly into the flame of a cleansing catastrophe, faith in its eternal victory? The reign of Heracles is coming. We shall yet see a temple to the genius of Man, a place for reflection, festivals, and performances, a place where men unite among themselves and with art, for the bright moments of enthusiastic consciousness of the Species' oneness in space and time, of its fate both fraught with suffering and exultant, both tormenting and triumphant. And at the gate of that colossal, radiant temple, the New Man will be greeted by the giant figures of Prometheus and Heracles, Reason and Labor, joining mighty hands above the bright and lovely door of joy.

And what of Christ? In that legend there is too much humility; yet here, too, a democratic feeling breaks through, and as it creates, it foreshadows the future, capturing the meaning of its fate.

Here as well, man is declared to be God. But who is he, whence does he come? The Messiah was anticipated from the four corners of the earth, but *not* from the ranks of the working people. Yet he came from Nazareth, of which everyone said, "What good could come from there?" He is no king, no general, no rich man—he is a carpenter. But, seated in the temple among the learned, even in his immature speech he already amazes them. Labor is quick to mature, and Marx did not speak in vain of the "gigantic children's boots" of the worker's thought. The most learned among the learned are forced to acknowledge in the still-infantile Labor its Messiahship. The noble Owen, the fiery Bakunin, the profound Marx all bowed before the cradle of a nascent proletariat. Its life overflows with deprivation, but amid that humiliation—wearing rough garments outside the splendid temple of civilization—it proclaims in proud awareness of its own greatness: "I can destroy this temple and rebuild it in three days." This sense of labor's creative and destructive power fills the hearts of its foes with rage, guardians of the old temple. In bursts of anger, has not Labor tried to drive the merchants and bankers out of the temple of life, where they have enthroned themselves as predators? Has it not ascended a Mount Tabor, transfigured, glowing with unexpected light on its typically dark face, bowed down to the earth? Were not the great days of the Commune and the International the Tabor of the proletariat? Why do myth and reality coincide? Because in many respects the myth grasps the very soul of history, expressing man's aspirations, in this case those of the lowly class of antiquity. And when the hour draws near for these hopes to be realized, events echo those ancient longings.

And the new Messiah ascends Calvary; his blood was shed; they fastened him to the cross. Mocking, they said to him: "You, who would free the world—free yourself from the convict prisons and graves into which we have cast you for your outbursts!" But Labor cannot be killed; it will rise again and resume its preaching, its painful struggle. It shall again bear its cross, from Golgotha to Golgotha, along a road lined with crosses, for truly the Savior of the World does not die but once.

But the day will come. The vengeful genius Michelangelo displayed its fierce splendor on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. Ah, do you expect a Second Coming? You look for a gentle Christ in white robes, his hair parted neatly in two, beard like that of a young priest, a frail idealist's body? No—he will not be so, the prophet Buonarroti cries out in somber colors. He will come like a lightning-charged Heracles, youthful, striking, avenging, a crusher of worlds, able to demolish everything in three days and rebuild it. Proud rulers, slanderers, exploiters, egoists, hypocrites shall plunge into the abyss in midair, as the thunderous archangelic trumpets clang in trembling air. Rising from the tombs will come the forerunners of that mighty day, for their judgment before the new humanity. Blessed are those who are honored; they shall enter the Pantheon of a grateful posterity. Woe to those who defiled the pages of mankind's history by their deeds—they will be enshrined in the Species' memory as repellent freaks within its family.

The old myths, the old hopes, reach out to the new. *Come forth,* poets of the great movement, artists of tomorrow—breathe a new life into the ancient myths; create new ones; show man his clarified, enlightened reflection through soul-shaking, rapturous symbols. Come, help the growth of universal sympathy and solidarity, link past and future with the golden bonds of art.

I once heard a gifted philologist lament the wretched destiny of Eros.

For the ancient Greek, he said, Eros was the dearest of the gods, portrayed as a gentle youth resplendent with the supple beauty of a young male body—already strong, already manly—his forehead brimming with thought, his eyes with calm love, his lips with sweet enchantment. See what happened to him in the latter era of the ancient world: he became the chubby Cupid armed with a toy bow, his swan wings—made for soaring to distant heavens—reduced to the wings of a dove, a dragonfly, a butterfly; a playful spirit of affairs and pleasures. As the mischievous scamp *Putto*, he was reborn in the Renaissance, and even now you may find him—merely ornamental for the barbaric hall of a merchant's house, jumbled together with "bouquets," clumsily flapping across wallpapers and ceilings. The degeneration of love. Christianity understood love too, but otherwise. Theirs was a love of self-sacrifice and suffering; its touching image was *the Alkonost bird,* tearing its own breast with its beak to feed its offspring with its blood, which it loved. But where today is love's symbol? Has love perished?

No, the socialist replied to the philologist. No, said the author of these pages. Love is not dead—it has moved among the lower ranks of society and has not yet found its artists and poets. Its symbol is coarse, but no less moving and profound than the earlier ones. In the banners of workers' unions, on the walls of labor exchanges and people's houses, one may see the emblem of the new love: *two powerful workers' hands clasping each other tightly, with two hammers crossed in the middle.* Greek love, its Eros, was a flight away from the world. The idealists of ancient times felt that the world did not satisfy man's soul, the demands of conscious life, and in their unrestrained imagination they constructed another, higher world close by—a perfect world. Their dream of it, their longing for it, they called their highest love. For Christians, in self-sacrifice, in pity, in death for one's friend they found that love, rejecting all in life but their mutual compassion, for they believed that the all-powerful Good would only set the wreath of happiness upon heads already bloodied by the crown of martyrdom. But the new man still imagines in his love, in his fantasy, an ideal of happiness and fellowship—but he no longer sees it separated by an abyss nor flies to it on the immaterial wings of mystical dream. His ideal is for him a plan by which he must reshape the world. In labor and technology he has found his own godhood, deciding to impose upon the world his will: With the hammer, the iron hammer, he will smash the malformed and the evil; with that same hammer he will forge his golden happiness. Blows shall ring out, debris shall fly, and from the shapeless mass shall gaze the face of the beautiful new humanized world, freed by the hammer. But only through cooperation is victory possible. Let us cross our mighty hammers, clasp each other's hands in solidarity. "In union is strength," the new love declares. "Not just to know, but to *transform* the world," the new love says. The working alliance is truly the keystone of the new church.

As I write these lines, I see before me a strange sign on a gray building: "*Ufficio di Genio*!"—"Office of Genius." It simply means the Engineering Department, which is almost comical. But reflect on it, and the soul is stirred. Humanity has already recognized in technology the best fruit of its genius. The only need is for that great Genius to hurry beneath the arches of the new church, for that Ariel to cease being the prisoner of greed and become the true and free friend of mankind. No wonder Strauss, speaking allegorically of Christ as the prototype of humanity, acknowledged His miracle-working power, for we see miracles of reason's triumph daily. We see the will subduing nature; the sick are healed, mountains move, oceans are easily crossed, thought itself flies on the wings of electricity from one hemisphere to another, and

seeing the accomplishments of Genius, do we not exclaim “What manner of man is this, that even the restless seas obey him?” Do we not sense that the god who was born between the ox and the donkey is growing stronger?

Poets, artists, priests, heroes—realize that in the working class is concentrated the social, hygienic, economic salvation, the entire salvation of the species. Let that not dismay you, but *gladden* you that it is young. Bring it your gifts: the pure gold of science, the incense of inspired artistry, the myrrh of sacred enthusiasm. It will take them, sow them and harvest them, and repay a hundredfold—a hundred talents for your talent.

Footnotes

1. James Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d’Israël.* ↩

Metaphysics and Historicism in Religion

In every large and mature religious system—sometimes in a mixed form, sometimes appearing more or less purely—there exist two principles for distinguishing good from evil, essentially opposed to each other.

Accordingly, whichever principle prevails in a given religion shapes how life itself is evaluated. The ideal, too, acquires not merely a different substance but even a completely different form.

a) *All the phenomena of the world are regarded as evil, while salvation from the world is deemed the good. Life in its fullness—sensation, thought, feeling, action— is rejected as inseparably linked with the world (which is evil). One accepts only the life of the spirit in its purest manifestations (pure intellect).*

Since, generally speaking, only two realms are available for humanity’s hopes—the future connected with the world and a beyond that is wholly distinct from the world, wholly spiritual—this means the future in the world is rejected (deemed essentially hopeless, the same as the present), while the otherworldly is extolled. Proclaiming pure spirit and its corresponding suprasensory domain as the sole good, utterly different from the world of phenomena, makes such religious systems inherently metaphysical.

b) *In the world, what is called evil is whatever causes suffering, destroys life, or diminishes it. Conversely, everything that aligns with life's interests and its development is deemed good.*

All of life, in all its fullness (sensation, thought, feeling, will), is recognized as good. Only those passions that harm individual or social life are labeled evil.

The world is held to be improvable; mankind is capable of actively increasing the total amount of good, reducing the amount of evil, and ultimately expunging evil from the world to win the victory of the singular good—which is conceived as a blissful life in a nature made radiant.

Proclaiming the process of ennobling humanity and nature as the meaning of existence makes such religions inherently historical.

Translated into the language of pure, mature, and honest realism, the metaphysical religions that deny the entire world naturally lose their ideal (that of pure spirituality) and lead to the idea of death—that is, they become entirely pessimistic. By the light of science, one must either recoil in horror from the alleged ideal of "pure spirituality" or else plainly conclude that death is preferable to life.

By contrast, the historical principle loses nothing by stripping away its mythology. Illuminated by scientific consciousness, historical religions boil down to proclaiming life and its servant, labor, as the only divine forces in the universe.

Throughout the entire religious history of mankind to the present day (and doubtless continuing for the near future), a struggle endures between these two religious principles. Christianity itself is an illogical, incoherent combination of both principles, which conflict within it. It is of great importance to have a clear picture of these two forms of religious worldview. The best means to achieve this is to become acquainted with two religions that embody both principles in relatively pure form and that have powerfully influenced the development of the human genius. A striking example of a metaphysical religion is Indian religiosity (specifically Brahmanism and its natural continuation—Buddhism). A striking example of a historical religion, the earliest philosophy of history, is Mazdaism.

Brahmanism and Buddhism

Nowhere in the world has the concept of *pure spirit* in contrast to all that is real and material reached so lofty a peak as in India—nor has it suffered such a terrible collapse.

A gifted, active race, which had created hosts of gods in its own image, a race of warriors and poets with expansive natures, poured from relatively cooler lands into the scorching, luxuriant India by way of conquest.

At the head of these fair-skinned people marched their "prince of gods," Indra. He was a soldier from top to bottom, with all his joy found in battle and revelry: a drunkard, a womanizer, a glutton, a bloodthirsty killer of men—thus was this merry god, this unbridled spirit, the god of those whom Nietzsche aptly termed the *Blonde Bestien* ("blond beasts").

They conquered the land, subjugating the dark-skinned population along with their wild religious notions, becoming kings of the country of jungles and elephants, of majestic quiet rivers and a searing sun in a bottomless blue sky.

But gradually, terror seized these valiant warriors. They did not fear the uprisings of the pitiful black folk, over whose necks they placed their feet. Yet this oppressively hot air, this heavenly fire that ignited in their veins an unquenchable thirst for pleasure; and at the same time that indomitable lethargy, that sweet slackening of muscles, that profound leaning toward oblivion and sleep—these things frightened them. Something firm, frosty, iron, dissolved within them, slowly melting into the warm, caressing, intoxicating atmosphere. Like the beautiful Circe, their new blazing nature kissed them, and they gave way. Some dreadful ruin, some paralyzing drowsiness crept in. And alongside the poison of luxurious apathy, that flaming disk in the indigo vault at times kindled in the soul a frenzy of passion that shattered all barriers, sparked bitter enmities among recent allies, and tore through, like cobwebs, the time-honored, unshakable laws of allied life—a passion that drove one to crime.

The instinct for self-preservation clamored for a stern life, but in this ocean of warm fragrance, there was no foothold. Every flower, as if quietly and sweetly mocking the poor Aryan conqueror, breathed poison upon him. The northerner had defeated the south, enjoying it as a slave unbelievably fair, spiced, sensual—and now he cannot rise or stand erect. His bones are limp, his head reels, and once more he falls onto the soft bed, fighting in a half-sleep, calling Indra, stretching out a hand to his heavy armor, while the "slave-woman," flattering and submissive, with a strange smile on her full lips, summons him again and again to pleasure.

With a terrible, wild leap of will, the Aryan convulsed himself. He cursed the sweet drink of life—and at a dreadful price he purchased freedom. He could no longer live as a man, a warrior, a worker, a father. He renounced everything lest he perish. So as not to overeat or get drunk, he doomed himself to endless hunger and thirst. In asceticism, he found his salvation from life.

Renan's remark seems profound: "Sensuality and self-denial are kin. The ascetic, hounded by his horror of life, mortifying himself to escape it, belongs to the same race that delights in the sensuous legend of Krishna. Krishna, the incarnation of pleasure and sensual oblivion, the ideal of a meek people deprived of strength, delivered to all temptations of nature, is essentially the brother of Śākya Muni. Krishna's banquets with the shepherdesses of Brindavan share something with the enervating asceticism of Buddhism."[1]

Yes. Sensuality and asceticism—two gulfs into which weakness falls, when it is unable to maintain itself on the ridge of activity, struggle, labor.

With especially horrifying swiftness, the fall of the proud race manifested itself in that sensual desire called the mingling of races with their dark subjects. The race darkened in both skin and soul. Hence the laws of Manu enforce, with stern vigor, caste barriers. A stubborn fight for self-preservation ensues. The guardian of racial purity becomes the intellectual aristocracy, the hereditary caste of sages and keepers of covenants with the ancient gods—the caste of Brahmans. A bearded sage with his *Vedas* and his sacrificial knife in hand stands face to face with the devil, the god of this corrupting land, who has so many golden snares ready everywhere.

Their reverence for the Brahman reveals the race's thirst to save itself. We must remember that the salvation of the race meant preserving its ruling position. The ruin of its military superiority, as a result of caste blending, would be the ruin of Aryan aristocracy. They rallied around the *Vedas*, the laws of Manu, and their exegetes the sages, like a palladium. This gives frightful power to the Brahmans. They expand extraordinarily in self-esteem. A rich imagination and sharp intellect, attributes of the Aryan clan, now swell and bubble in India's hot air. Her immense landscapes, the insanely fertile vigor of her soil, the mirages of her trembling atmosphere, the terror of her night full of sounds—all gave nourishment to a kind of wild mythological creativity; all magnified every thought, every feeling. A Brahman was proud of his exceptional status: guardian of the race, friend of the gods, healer and engineer—he looked down upon kings in their purple, pearls, and sharp swords. What need had he of such trifles? He was king of kings. Soon he would lord it over the very gods themselves.

Characteristic is the legend of a Brahman's struggle with a king. A certain king sought to snatch a cow from a Brahman. But with a single glare, the Brahman rendered the king's servants powerless and saved his cow. The king, offended yet perceiving that conventional weapons blunted themselves against the magic circle that the honored elder had traced around himself, decided to take vengeance by acquiring power equal to his adversary's. So for a year the king fasted, consuming no food. Then, proud of his ascetic merits, he hurled his spear—but it dropped at the venerable elder's feet. Furious, the king fasted 10 years, taking neither food nor drink. Pilgrims from all the provinces gathered to marvel at this holy man sitting immovable beneath a sycamore. After those 10 years, the king rose and hurled his spear at the Brahman. Such was the blow's force that the mountains quaked, yet again the spear obediently fell at the feet of the saintly elder. Enraged, the king, with his immeasurably passionate soul, fasted 100 years, taking neither food nor drink and refraining from breathing. Then heaven and earth were shaken. Indra summoned the gods to council. "Have you heard of this hermit?" asked Mahadeva. "He is now stronger than all of us. The stars tumble from the sky to adorn his sandals. The earth trembles in awe. Nothing is impossible for him." So the king rose, approached the Brahman, clasped his knees, and, hiding his face in the elder's robes, whispered shamefacedly: "Father, forgive me my long anger, and show me a mighty grace: admit me into the sacred caste, as the lowliest among the Brahmans."

Needless to say, the world's literature can hardly show a legend more brimming with unbridled priestly pride.

Only the Brahman knew how to offer sacrifice to the gods. Conducted correctly, a sacrifice, so the haughty priest declared, was all-powerful. There was no room for divine caprice. The gods were forced to comply with prayers delivered in the language of the *Vedas*, with the sacrifice performed in perfect form.

This position—this dogma—spurred the Brahman's thinking. He already felt lord of the world: the elemental gods his servants. He assured others, and himself, of this. He subjugated the gods of heaven and earth by means of other gods: the gods of sacrifice, Agni, Soma, Brahman. Hence these three are mightier than all the rest. The ritual gods rank above the cosmic gods. Agni (fire) is mysterious and pure, akin to spirit. Still more akin is Soma (the intoxicating drink). After all, is it not some strange, joyful spirit that enters a man when he consumes that wondrous liquid? But of them all, "Brahman" (the Word, the power of incantation) is the most spiritual. *Logos* is here raised to the throne of the world. The Word is a creative force. Spurned labor lies somewhere far off now; no, the *magical*, potent, "realized" Word is man's key to power over the universe. The bearer of the incorporeal, spiritual, rational Brahman-Logos is the fleshly Brahman-priest. *Logos* lives in him. Who is he? Who dwells in the breast, or mind, of the sage who knows spells that make Indra quail? This is not a pitiful body, which dies and turns to dust. It is part of the divine Logos, a shard of the almighty, immortal spirit. Where is it, in what does it reside? It is *ātman,* the breath, the invisible principle of life, the "I" of my self, intangible, something entirely distinct from the material—pure thought, different from any particular thought, like a bottle from its contents. To understand it, one must pour out all contents, leaving the vessel empty: chase away, chase away thought so that only *thought* remains. Think no longer of this or that, or of anything, but only *think*. This is beyond life. It is no longer life; it is higher than life. It is an attribute-less essence, a form without content. Later Indian philosophers phrase that logical operation, by which man hopes to grasp his religion of pure spirit and so capture that state which makes him master of the world's temptations—an operation that in reality carries him with the force of a maelstrom into the whirlpool of nihilism and death:

> "The sage ascends above the idea of form; the idea of individual existence vanishes for him, and he perceives that there are no distinctions; he concludes that only infinity in space exists. *He halts there.*
>
> "Rising above the idea of space, he perceives it as the mind's representation: 'All is the infinity of mind,' he says, *and halts there*.
>
> "Rising above the idea of the infinity of mind, he concludes that absolutely nothing exists: 'All is nothing,' says he, *and halts there.*
>
> "Rising above the idea of absolute nothingness, he concludes that there is neither being nor non-being, *and halts there.*
>
> "Ascending beyond the plane where there is neither being nor non-being, he reaches the end of concept itself, of every movement of mind. There *he halts*."

But this monstrous logical operation would have yielded no practical results were it not for the invincible fatigue of living, warring, and thinking that overtook the Brahman aristocracy—and all India, indeed.

Nietzsche rightly notes, as the basis of such a teaching:

> "Two physiological facts: first, an excessive irritability of the sensitivity, expressing itself in an exquisitely refined capacity for suffering; second, an overdeveloped intellect, too prolonged a life amid abstract notions and logical procedures, under whose influence the personal instinct pales before the impersonal."

But Nietzsche is mistaken in supposing that Buddhism constituted a reaction *against* Brahmanism. Not in the least. The highly philosophical, ultra-nihilistic passage quoted above comes from a *Buddhist* text, the *Saggiti Sutta*.

Nietzsche strove to exalt Buddhism above Christianity, which introduced substantial confusion of ideas and historical facts into his work *The Antichrist*. The truth is, his characterization of original Christianity (the Christianity of Jesus, which he artificially severs even from the Gospels, constructing it purely by intuition and declaring it equal to Buddhism) is only indirectly relevant to that religion, yet it perfectly clarifies the psychological aspect of metaphysical religions—the logical side of which is revealed by the above excerpt from the *Saggiti Sutta*.

Nietzsche says:

> "We know the condition of morbid oversensitivity to the sense of touch, in which one recoils from any contact, from every brushing against a solid object. Translate that physiological *habitus* into the language of its ultimate logic—as an instinctive hatred of all reality, a flight into the 'incomprehensible' or 'unknowable,' an aversion to all formula, to every notion of time and space, to everything firm, to custom, institution, or church. It is life in a world that no reality touches anymore, an exclusively 'interior' world, a 'true' world, an 'eternal' world… 'The kingdom of God is within you'…"

The Brahmans reflected their philosophical conclusions and their extraordinary mood in their conception of the world, offering it a wondrous interpretation. The world's essence—God Brahma—is precisely that pure spirit, that empty-of-all-content, thought-without-thought, which the Brahman has discovered at the core of his soul, as his refuge from the world's temptations and from the life-bazaar that has wearied him with its noise and brightness. Thought is absolutely divine, so long as it does *not* think; spirit is pure and still so long as it neither dreams, nor creates, nor desires. But great Brahma, being potential imagination, filled himself with real concepts and forms. This is in truth the *fall* of Brahma. Brahma conjured the sleepy dream of life, the illusory so-called real or material world. In that world, or *Māyā* (mirage), there is much that is beautiful—but individual beauties only make it more baneful, for they keep man's spirit from perceiving in time the nightmare nature of the dream as a whole and from rejecting, by violent force of will, his supposed individual existence, thereby waking on Brahma's bosom—in non-being. He must not die an ordinary death—that is merely an act *within*

the same dream—but *by thought* he must break its chains. That is the victory. A sacred verse declares:

> "When he is freed from every desire of the heart,
> The mortal enters Brahma here on Earth, already immortal."
> *(Oldenberg, Buddha, p. 48)*

But is that "resurrection in Brahma's bosom" not indeed the total rejection of life? Certainly. The Brahman thinks he denies, as evil, only part of life—passion, desires, emotions, sensations—and retains a life of spirit all the purer for it, *pure reason*. But he errs. His philosophy extends greatly the evangelical formula: "If one of your limbs offends you, cut it off and cast it away, for it is better for one limb to perish than for the whole body to be ruined." The Brahman discovered that *all* limbs, *all* faculties of his soul seduce him; he cut them all off with a spiritual knife and cast them aside psychologically. An immovable spirit, he told himself, a disembodied spirit. But here is the delusion. *Life* itself, in its passionate desire for pure happiness unsoiled by moral or physical suffering, confuses that happiness with *rest,* or even *absolute rest*. But *rest* is the negation of happiness and of life. It is as though life made it its goal to remain itself while being freed from the body, continuing to vibrate outside organism, nerves, brain. But a bodyless spirit does not exist, just as music cannot exist without something vibrating. A spirit that no longer stirs—because all stirring has turned into pain—negates itself. We call "spirit" precisely the highest form of our *mobility*. In short, this is a dreadful aberration of organic life, trampled by the monstrous fruits of unusual functions of its organs. Ultimately the ideal becomes something utterly contemptible. Renan recounts:

> "I saw, in an Egyptian village bordering the eastern desert, a holy man. He had sat there for twenty years on the sand, immersed in a dim slumber, unable to see or hear any longer. His legs were dry as a skeleton's bones. The sun, roasting his skull, had dessicated all consciousness in him. He deserved less the name of a living creature than did a reed or a palm tree."

"What is the Brahman's god?" Oldenberg asks—and answers:

> "He is the Great One, before whom all human striving falls silent, where every color fades, every sound stops. There is no hymn of praise, nor prayer, nor hope, nor fear, nor love. Man's gaze is fixed unwaveringly within himself, trying in the depths of his own being to perceive his 'I' as something eternal, singular. In a word laden with deep meaning, shrouded in mystery, the awakened thinker discloses the secret of the invisible witness, the inaudible listener, for whom Brahmans abandon their property, wives, children, roaming the wide earth as homeless beggars."

It is hard to say how widely this doctrine penetrated the masses and whether it was broadly disseminated outside the Brahman caste at all. In any event, according to these beliefs only Brahmans could attain salvation. Other men and animals had to earn the right, by their own merits, to be reborn at a higher level and ultimately as Brahmans. The hierarchy of happiness fully coincided, for Brahmanism, with the zoological and social-caste hierarchy. Among the populace at large, the Brahmans upheld all superstitions, pointing to rich, lavish sacrifice as

what pleased the gods most. The wealthy could be saved by sacrifice; Brahmans by their knowledge of the *Vedas* and by contemplation. The path of salvation was in effect closed to everyone else, and they were of no concern. It was widely believed in a non-canonical way that even a *śūdra* might rise high, but only at the price of incredible privations and self-torture.

The revolution of the Buddha was connected with an upsurge in the self-consciousness of the middle and lower ranks.[2]

While aligning itself philosophically with Brahmanism, Buddhism first *vulgarized* that teaching, making it fairly straightforward and comprehensible to all. The path of knowledge ceased to be a privilege of priests. Second, it denied the significance of sacrifice: the path of salvation ceased to be the privilege of the rich. Third, it repudiated any significance for asceticism or the mortification of the flesh: the path of salvation ceased to be a torturous privilege of the few. It rejected superstition. Far from being, as Nietzsche asserts, a wholly *positive* religion, Buddhism still sought to fuse its metaphysical doctrine with each person's psychological experience.

As the path of salvation leading to rebirth in higher forms and finally to *liberation*, to nirvana (which replaced a return to Brahma's bosom), Buddhism commended a life of poverty and, in general, the struggle against one's egotism.

The hierarchy of salvation no longer paralleled social hierarchy. On the contrary, everything was turned upside down. In his fine studies on Buddhism, Renan states:

> "The success of Buddhism is explained above all by its appeal to the poor. Beggars recognized in the new religion a way to live.[3] The monk's robe uplifted them, granting dignity to their poverty. In one comedy, a gambler who has lost everything consoles himself: 'Then I shall become a Buddhist, so I may go along the highways with my head held high.' Becoming Buddhist, a slave gained freedom. A whole mass of legends strives to prove that it is easier for a poor man to be saved than for a rich man. Even a god laments his high birth: 'For one who is highly born, salvation and the religious life are difficult; for one of low birth, they are easy.'"[4]

In essence, the thought of Buddhist philosophers traveled the same route as that of the Brahmans. The pessimistic nihilism of the latter was perhaps exceeded:

> "A hermit," a Buddhist philosophical text states, "like a bird hatching in an egg, breaks his shell. I have attained a deep, tranquil immortality, shining, unimaginable. I shall remain in silence among the forest shadows, in the depths of my own essence. There is no substance. He who knows the chain of causes and effects knows that there is neither being nor non-being."
>
> "Love, sacrifice, self-assertion have no meaning. This world does not exist; nor does the future world. There are no gods. Man is formed of four elements. When his time is up, he renders earth to earth, water to water, fire to fire, and wind to wind, while his feeling rises into the ether and dissolves there. Four men carry the coffin, making five in all, and they cremate the man according to the rites. His bones turn

> into white salt, his body burns in the flames of the pyre. Ignorant or wise, so long as one maintains that something exists—after death you will be broken apart and destroyed."
>
> "The state of freedom resembles a dreamless sleep."

It is hard to call such teachings anything other than *pessimistic nihilism*. Nietzsche finds Buddhism *optimistic,* but this time, in truth, his view stems not just from his extreme subjectivism, because in his own interesting work Oldenberg attempts to prove something like that as well.[5]

The crux is that, once Buddhism became widespread, it forfeited its purity. The goal, nirvana, receded into the background; the path of abstinence and altruism, yielding calm of spirit and relative happiness, became everything. Buddhism acquired an idyllic aspect that made it akin to Franciscanism. It lost its bitterness and vehemence, becoming a slow climb toward the same nirvana now placed far off—a climb not without its pleasantness. Its hygienic elements overcame or temporarily overshadowed its metaphysics. In its doctrine that renunciation, the quelling of all over-strong emotions, and indifference to riches and other worldly matters bring one peace of mind, Buddhism drew from psychological experience. That side of it gained a foothold in nearly all of India for a time. It still prevails in Ceylon and Indochina. But in India, the simple, coherent teaching of the Buddha soon receded beneath the renewed pressures of the higher castes on one hand and the spirit of superstition and passion for fantastically elaborate and vibrant myths on the other. The civilization of the middle class, the enlightened democratic monarchy of Ashoka, collapsed. With it, any hope of India's social or political greatness perished for good. At any rate, the moral empire of Ashoka was, as his edicts reveal, too mild and lacking in self-consciousness for that era. Possibly that is what destroyed it.

Buddhism's spread among the Mongols was accompanied by astonishing distortions, which we shall not dwell on here.

A good portrayal of moderate Buddhism, more or less adjusted to life, is found on the following page of the Renan book we have quoted:

> "Ashoka's ideal, that Buddhist Constantine, is a state religion served by many officials who manage and teach the people for their happiness. Respect for all living things in general, the ban on killing—these are the moral foundation for Ashoka. The absolute monarchy is devoted to the planting of useful trees, medicinal herbs, to the building of gardens for shade and rest for men and beasts, to the digging of wells and reservoirs by the roadside. Government's goal is the happiness of men and animals. This is summarized in one of Ashoka's rock edicts: 'Thus speaks King Tiadaśi, dear to the gods: "Religion is splendid. But what is religion? The reduction of evil, the increase of good, piety, benevolence, truthfulness, and purity of life."'"

Earthly happiness is not despised, though eternal salvation is preferred to it. In any event, no chasm is acknowledged between the two: that which grants a calm and happy life on earth also serves salvation. This is the strength of moderate Buddhism, as it is of moderate Christianity.

But in both religions, expressed moderately, we see a deficiency of creative energy and a total absence of militant spirit. They are religions of human self-defense, not offense. *Morality* takes the place of labor, but it is not the morality of life's expansion—rather, of moderation and mutual pity. Nietzsche's attempt to exalt Buddhism over Christianity could not lead him to truth. Christianity, adapting itself to the needs of more active peoples, became even more energetic than Buddhism.

The Indian religio-philosophical mind devised, and carried to the highest refinement, a unique means of fighting evil by *diminishing man's demands*. Later on, such a doctrine could be offered purely as a moral-hygienic system by Cynics and Epicureans, with no reference to religion. Yet Indian cynicism is loftier and more noble than Europe's cynicism, and thus more appealing to the human heart, because it is *religion*. And the presence of deity (Brahma) is not what matters here. In the pure Pali Buddhism, God plays no role whatsoever. Crucial, all the same, is the triumphant reconciliation of the laws of life with the laws of the universe. Even though life has disfigured its ideal, substituting rest for it, at least the moral law of life—self-atonement, self-liberation, self-purification—is declared in Buddhism to be the world's only law. What is the world?—a cluster of souls at various stages of salvation, each at varying distances from luminous repose. If Indian philosophy is stripped of this metaphysics, it degenerates into the crude personal-hygienic quest for well-being by renouncing any ideal—i.e., cynicism and its variants. The pessimism of Ecclesiastes, seeing the world as vanity, stands but partially aligned with Indian philosophy, for the latter is deeper. This is not mere pointless vanity, but rather a process of self-purification. Later Greek philosophy (the Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans) might, perhaps, have been directly influenced by the Indians, though of course the same results could have followed independently from the mind's labor in the dire setting of the ancient world's collapse. The marks of an anti-cosmic religion of redemption are also obvious in the complex and changing physiognomy of Christianity—particularly in certain of its intriguing branches, such as Manichaeism. The so-called pessimistic philosophy, whose figurehead is Schopenhauer, largely constitutes a modernized Buddhism. In general, *metaphysical religiosity* in our sense has run rampant over much of mankind. To put it briefly, it is the product of despair at the prospect of transforming the real world, and thus the impulse to extricate oneself from it, to save the purest part of life—called *spirit*—and transfer it, via various techniques, to a different realm, absolutely suited to this pure spirit, which they would call Nirvana or by the ancient name of God.

But for a man who thirsts for living life, it is hard to remain on that summit (doubtful as it is) of pure spiritualism. Bastard doctrines arise: the desire to preserve the innocence of pure spirituality *and* to acquire a capital of bodily pleasures. Something of Mammon's gifts one hopes to carry into the bosom of God-Spirit. This is but a fall from the height of religious-philosophical notions of salvation to the level of a vulgar notion—an otherworld must be earthlike, but a "rose without thorns." And by "thorns," one means not only suffering and hardship, but also labor, struggle, effort, creativity: "a rose without thorns" is the perfect bliss. I recently heard an Italian *Stenterello* (Punch) formulate his ideal: *mangiare bene, bere meglio, fare niente*—"to eat well, drink even better, and do nothing." Not only do Christian poets of paradise—like Prineas and Lactantius—come close to Stenterello, not only does Muhammad elaborate and add to that vulgar ideal, but so too the latest, most refined mystics and spiritualists (for example, Mr.

Berdyaev). True, they are unconcerned with food and drink, but they are not against "heavenly joys" in the shining realm of salvation. A "metaphysics," teaches Mr. Berdyaev in his new book,[6] can teach us that the world's being must free itself from the fetters of "matter," from nature's oppressive lawfulness, that space and time must vanish as a nightmare. "This perfectly coincides," he says, "with the final, most essential, and the most mysterious idea of religious consciousness regarding the *transfiguration* of 'the earth,' the transfiguration of 'the flesh.' The age-old fight rages against the primal bondage, the enslavement we call 'matter,' against the limitations of space and time—though not against 'earth' or 'flesh.' The earth will remain—transfigured, not bound by material laws, liberated, timeless and spaceless; flesh will remain—transfigured, not physical but full-blooded, sensual, mystically voluptuous, and eternal, freed from any material limitations. Metaphysics justifies this mystical presentiment, but only in religion is the mystery grasped."

Marvelous! Matter is unneeded, yet flesh may remain. *Immaterial, unfleshly flesh!* Mr. Berdyaev is prepared to surrender his body but not his sensuousness; indeed he wants to be full-blooded, *extradimensionally* full-blooded! Apart from the fact that this nonsense would make even Punch's ears shrivel, it is thoroughly typical: we see the first sign of man's parasitic state, for the religion that strives to tear spirit from matter is the symptom that, in one way or another, nature has crushed in these men their human-labor capacity, making them parasites. The first sign: "a rose without thorns," an idle bliss where sensuousness is carefully preserved, yet no mention is made of creativity or growing strength: it would be the life of an animal (albeit an extradimensional yet very corporeal one), for whose comfort some master is responsible. The transformation of the world into a "rose without thorns" also unfolds independently of human labor. Man's role in the matter is negligible.

> "For man cut off from the Absolute Source of being, it is impossible to achieve the transfiguration of the 'earth,' its deliverance from space and time, its release from confinement and necessity, or the transfiguration of the 'flesh' into an eternal, incorruptible, individual being. But for God, all is possible."

God, presumably, will take care of everything.

We shall address elsewhere the bastard offspring of metaphysical religion and historicism—*liberal idealism*. Now let us turn to a different religious viewpoint, the ancestor of the more noble modern tendencies.

Footnotes

1. Renan, *Etudes d'histoire religieuse*, p. 83. ↩

2. Buddhism in many respects matches the Brahmanic philosophy of *Śākhya*, which differs from absolute "Vedanta" in being less priestly and more secular in character. ↩

3. The same thing happened with the spread of Christianity. ↩

4. Renan, *Etudes d'histoire religieuse*, p. 147. ↩

5. Oldenberg, *Buddha—Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* ["Buddha: His Life, His Teachings, His Community"]. ↩

6. *Sub specie aeternitatis*. ↩

---

2) Mazdaism

Stenterello's ideal—"to eat, to drink, and to do nothing"—is a vulgar ideal. Not only is it, as anyone at first glance would say, an *animal* ideal, but in fact it ranks far below what would be the ideal of a normal animal. It is the ideal of a *parasite*.

It is beyond doubt that needs—specifically *animal* needs—are what generate the movement of that higher spirit about which spiritualists speak in such reverent tones: needs drive progress.

But the needs of a healthy animal organism do not by any means boil down to hunger and thirst. An animal in favorable conditions like those imagined by Punchinello—ample food and drink—would then discover a third factor as a source of unhappiness: doing nothing. A well-fed organism longs to function fully and freely. If work is not necessary, the animal revels and plays. The expenditure of its stored energy becomes an urgent need—a matter of life or death, for obesity and degeneration await one who does not solve this new problem life presents.

The body's organs develop as instruments for continuing life. If life can be maintained without labor, these organs still require exercise. Hence *play* is consistently an imitation of hunting, combat, labor, etc. Play is more pleasant than labor because it lacks elements of compulsion, being carried out by a plan suited to one's needs. Yet even slight fatigue and even at times danger to life arise as a necessity for an organism armed (by heredity) for struggle yet not struggling. Observe the various forms of modern sport, and the enormous role they occupy in the lives of classes freed from labor or of those forced by over-specialized labor into adopting them.

Only a parasite, only a degenerate animal—like an aphid gradually stripped of its mobility and even of its organs, reduced to being a "mere stomach"—feels no need for activity. In the ideal of a harmonious human being, *activity* is a primary essential.

If *play* surpasses labor by virtue of its organization and its concord with our specific needs (for example, gymnastics), *labor* surpasses play by its results. Obviously, purposive labor aims to achieve some good, generally an improvement. Attaining the goal, recognized in advance as a good, provides man (and likewise animals) a deep feeling of satisfaction. This feeling, too, is a weapon in the struggle: the joyful moments of creativity, of the fight, gradually overshadow myriad other joys that man has rightly labeled "lower." Successful labor is a source of enduring, healthful, developmental joy. The thirst for creativity cannot be erased from the human soul without also degrading him below the level of an animal.

Man, a being armed for struggle, evaluates all as good or bad for himself: that is, easy and pleasant to assimilate—*beauty*—or the opposite—*ugliness*. In rejoicing over the positive, in his capacity to exult over good and beauty—that is, ultimately, over whatever fosters life's growth and signals a high degree of its progress—life wields a wondrous weapon, a perpetual impetus to strive and to create. In having the power to strive and create, man finds the promise of ever new joys. The depth to which the sense of delight in beauty, strength, wealth is developed in man is evidenced by the cry of the Roman populace: *Panem et circenses!* ("Bread and circuses!")

But now we hear the parasite's voice: both of these (bread and circuses) must be *given* to him. The worker and the artist would *create* them for themselves and others.

Hence, life—animal life, the organs of our bodies—already hints to us, with the faint voices of its demands, an ideal: nourishment, exercise, creativity, joy.

We cannot, however, forget among these needs the need for *reproduction*. "Love and hunger move the world," said Schiller.

In the mystical philosophy of parasitism, love has left only mystical sensuality, pure physiology in its crudest form—despite the addition of the word "mystical." That is the ideal of some onanist. But the need for reproduction is vastly more than that. Take a run-of-the-mill animal and look: it has the need for union with a being of the opposite sex, the need to be appealing to it, to prevail over rivals, to show itself off. Then comes love for the offspring, the maternal and generally familial feeling. It would be superfluous to offer examples here. Whoever doesn't know them should read Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*.

What a wealth of physical and spiritual beauty this sexual passion produces. It creates the greatest feeling in organized matter—*love* in all its branches: unfulfilled passion, conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, filial love, brotherly love, love for progeny, for one's clan, for humanity. It is the first time man's spirit transcends the individual: passion is stronger than the instinct for self-preservation. A mother's love, and by extension the love for posterity or for the tribe, conquers egoism. If a parasite is content with mere sensuality, the harmonious man requires all branches of love. Simon, the mysterious rival of Christ, said of God: "He is father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister, he is himself and friend."

Love for posterity is particularly important in religion. It opens vast roads to that other, wonderful, and certainly completely "animal" feeling—*hope*. If I myself was not happy, perhaps my child, my grandchild shall be. If I did not emerge victorious, a victor will rise from my seed.

In merging ourselves lovingly with the lineage, in that conquest of death and time, we find something often characteristic of the Jewish people. That power dwelt in it with such intensity that the Jew ignored one other potential solace or hope—belief in personal immortality, an otherworld. That belief draws on misinterpreted facts, illusions, or dreams.

Apostle Paul says, "We are saved in hope." Two peoples have given powerful voice to this truth: the Israelite and the Persian. Both pictured this hope as being realized by their distant descendants. Historians still debate which of these two great peoples—who each so strongly bound together forefathers and offspring in love—really originated Messianism and, with it, a philosophy of history. We shall need to point out some differences between each nation's historical-religious worldview. Undeniably, the Jews possessed a more robust sense of the "species." This is proved by the fact that no nation was more indifferent to life beyond the grave. Despite all suffering, a Jew fixed his gaze on the future and consoled himself with the radiant fate of his grandchildren. Dying did not frighten him: "He died full of years" is the constant epitaph for righteous Jews. The Bible is the best illustration for the new ideas of the esteemed Prof. Mechnikov. But to die childless was *terrifying* to a Jew. He knew no worse punishment. The Persian was evidently more individualistic, more religiously self-centered. He did not pass up the convenient possibility of shifting life's vexing questions into another realm.

Yet proclaiming the illusion of an afterlife as an "undeniable fact" takes on a different form among metaphysical vs. practical peoples.

Overwhelmed by the oppressive nature of the conquered land, the Indian receded into himself. He declared the next world, another life, to be the only true reality, while living, actual life was just a mirage. The Persian, by contrast, took this world for the center of everything. The conquest of nature, the turning of blessed Iran into a blossoming garden of delight, seemed feasible to him. He prized labor. He honored his fellow man, as well as his posterity, as a workforce—co-builders of his domain. Consequently, the afterlife for him served merely as a *tool* of morality and discipline: whoever labors, loves, and is truthful will be happy after death; liars, idlers, and oppressors will be punished. In magnificent imagery, the writer of the 22nd Yasht sets out his ideal and, at once, his faith in afterlife retribution: "At the close of the third night [after death], at the first dawn, it seems to the soul of the believer that his own conscience comes toward him in the figure of a shining maiden in white robes, strong, slender, noble, proud in bearing, and so wondrously beautiful as one can conceive. When the soul of the believer addresses her and asks, 'Who are you, maiden, the fairest I have ever seen?' she replies: 'O you, young man who thought only what was good, who spoke only what was good, and who did only good and pious deeds—I am your own conscience. For your greatness, goodness, gentleness, your victorious power and freedom from sorrow, all men loved you—and so do I appear to you. Whenever you saw a man ridiculing [the sacred], or devoting himself to idol-worship, or repulsing the poor and shutting his door to him, then you would remain seated, chanting psalms and glorifying the Son of the Lord and by your charity gladdening both neighbor and stranger. I was already loved, but you made me yet sweeter; I was beautiful, you made me even more so by your good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. And from now on men will honor me.'"

But a distinctive feature of the Persian viewpoint is its harmonious blending of the religion of progress with the religion of immortality. The laborious and militant progress will end in a complete victory—so the Persian believed with unshakeable conviction in the flourishing heyday of his civilization. Then both heaven and earth, and every law of the world, shall be transformed at their roots. Death will be annihilated. All the deceased shall rise again, not in spirit but truly in body—now made eternal. The Persian did not regard matter or flesh as inferior. If he yearned for a new life, it had to be real, *not* illusory, and he generated that beautiful idea of a bodily resurrection from the dead. The Jews and Christians undeniably borrowed this notion from the Persians.

Universal immortality became the *reward* for labor: work selflessly for the common building project and you yourself will rise bodily to enjoy the fruits of your labor. You build *for yourself*. Note—this is not in heaven, but on earth.

Everything that advanced the building: alliances, modes of labor, tools, useful animals, the land, the sun, rain, etc., along with every virtue of cooperation—discipline, industry, truthfulness, justice, knowledge, etc.—naturally counted as "good." Everything, in nature or morals, that hindered labor and construction was "evil." The entire world was taken for a battle between good and evil. The Persians personified both camps in multitudes of spirits around the bright Ahura-Mazda and the dark Angra Mainyu. Divine aid was assured to man-the-laborer. But in fully recognizing man's decisive role in this battle, the Persians made *man—the Savior*—the real commander of the forces of good, of all the beneficial powers of earth and heaven, in the days of the final battle.

Following that triumph, all shall revive, all shall be pardoned. Evil is eradicated once and for all, drowned, dissolved in the ocean of light. Not only men but also wicked spirits are forgiven. They are not killed—that would be a half-victory—under the feet of the blessed in paradise, there is no prison of Hell trembling in groans and convulsions. The evil spirits themselves become good. Only Angra Mainyu dies. He is the absolute minus, absolute nothingness, *death*. He lived a phantasmal life only so long as he could be destructive. But now existence and life hold sway everywhere—there is not a corner for darkness. Precisely *nirvana,* so dear to the Indian, is declared illusory and is definitively banished from the universe. Precisely *Māyā,* the living, rosy, smiling, sweet one—triumphs all around.

The doctrine of punishment and reward beyond the grave, developed in detail by the Persians, was evidently indispensable or at least beneficial for wide social cooperation. It sustained discipline by acting upon the imagination of the more corrupt members of society. From our modern viewpoint, that doctrine—crucial, too, in Christian religion—is one of the baser facets of religious worldview at large. In it, we see not the flight of imagination by the suffering but happiness-desiring man, but a calculating construction intended to stifle vice (and likewise individual freedom) through physical fear and the lure of reward. Abandoning belief in hell and heaven signals a great leap forward in the development of man's inner freedom. Once the joy we take in good (wholly or partly created by man's efforts) and our sorrow over harm to life and progress become our sufficient guides, a man is deeply insulted to be told of some other reward

for the first, or unspeakably barbarous torment for the second. God as judge, policeman, executioner becomes both unnecessary and repugnant.

The Persian mind, by its higher notion of bodily resurrection and forgiveness for sinners, overcame its own earlier construction. In that respect, Mazdaism is plainly and incontrovertibly superior to Christianity. It still posits a sort of purgatory as a "bath" of nearly voluntary suffering to wash away sin's grime from the sinner's face—so he can go unashamed beside his bright brethren, the righteous. But Mazdaism unequivocally rejects the idea of an eternal dungeon. The loving lips of Jesus—if we trust the Gospels—spoke mercilessly cruel, bestial words about the "fire that shall not be quenched," the "worm that dies not," and "wailing and gnashing of teeth" forever. And all that is done by the Father's will, and we are to emulate the Father. In trying to copy him, we, feeble mortals, could only burn heretics alive or make soup from witches. The father of love was logically turned by the Calvinists into a capricious, unyielding tormentor. Ormuzd torments no one. He leads all to good, joy, light. If suffering crosses our path, it is because we must overcome evil's power—outside ourselves and within ourselves. Suffering is the world's purification. Ormuzd himself suffers for his children and fights for them, but he is truly kind.

Yet the idea of personal resurrection no longer fits into the framework of the modern scientific worldview. For the modern mind, religious pledges plainly contradicting science or infinitely diverging from its language and claims prove too flimsy and unsubstantial. No educated person, strictly speaking, believes in a personal resurrection—even if he tries to convince himself and others that he does. If he erects his religion upon this sand, he will in his sincere moments of reflection, sensing how the structure trembles and creaks under the cold flood of thought, endure torments worse than death: torments of parting from the phantom of eternal life, not from a short life. We would not wish these agonies of poisonous doubt upon even the worst enemies of truth.

But if faith in personal resurrection is impossible for the skeptic mind of today, it is simultaneously unnecessary. The genius of Mazdaism took into account the organism's craving to prolong its own existence indefinitely and to foresee one day enjoying sweet fruits of its labor—personally. But the Jews, until they learned of the Persian religion, had hoped for happiness solely for their posterity. Tribal egoism now melts away; the international idea of brotherhood is proclaimed by Christianity, by science, by an expanded sense of sympathy. Future humanity will be the replacement for future Jewry. Above all stands the gradual growth of the sense of unity among the species. This feeling runs parallel to the sense of collective building. The English proverb says: "Have a child, or write a book, or plant a tree." That is the new immortality. In every strong community—Greek, especially Roman—personal identity sank deeply into national construction, giving itself freely, joyfully, for the whole and for the future. Our future was felt as one's own, because "I" was regarded as part of the whole. Plato, a child of decadence, despite his teaching on the soul's immortality, said that a noble man must leave behind some trace of himself—either in the memory of friends or in a book. The longing for personal immortality, the overrating of one's own "I," grows as the strength of the ties connecting man to society is diminished. Individualism is the product of social decadence. In great epochs of art it advanced organically; artists knew how to subordinate their individuality

to the common aim and to create a great style. The Renaissance epoch is considered profoundly individualistic. Its finest product was art—and here we see two marks of the knack for self-abnegation, for *not* seeking novelty at any price (a vice of our art), for being able to find one's chord in the collective concert. These marks are the existence of successive, developing schools, and of great architecture. Renaissance artists self-consciously began where the preceding generation left off; cooperating, often with real selflessness, in serious concern for the evolution of their object, art. Beginning with Petrarch, the thirst for immortality decisively takes on the character of craving *glory,* good repute among posterity.

At present only science truly progresses; art experiences disarray and decline. In science, we see that same continuity, that same building, and among scientists the largest number who, without reservation, believe in progress and live for their field, for *their object*.

Nietzsche spoke of "love for the distant ones" and "love for ghosts." By "ghosts" he meant not fantasies in general but those super-individual beings that, to the egoist or individualist, are illusions, whereas to the true man they are the true essence. To live for science, for art, for technical progress, etc., is to find your immortality in building. Where your treasure is, there is your soul as well. Lay up your true treasure on earth: then your soul will remain on earth with it. Erecting the marvel of culture's palace, I commune intimately with both the past and the future generation. By cooperating with them, I remain with them so long as their labor continues. Even in *this* lifetime I sense my immortality. Turn your mind to science, its future, and the theoretical and practical vistas it opens, and eternity for a moment will enlighten your soul; tangibly, for a moment, you merge with the knowing reason, the creative energy, of divine humanity. Hence as collectivism and the collective-creative principle grow, the cult of the future, cleansed of selfish adulteration, will slough off the fable of personal resurrection. The new religion of humanity must stand free from fantastical postulates; the real prospects of science and creativity, when deeply considered, surpass all fantasy. Let us meld with the species; let us strive for its perfection and immortality. It is *you*!

As needful as belief in hell, heaven, and personal resurrection was for mankind in its infancy, so also was the concept of aid from the gods. The Persian's clear, practical mind was equally remote from a cosmism that engulfs man, subordinates him to nature, and from that rigid spiritualism that splits the universe into spirit and matter. The Mazdeist Persian loves nature, respects it, finds in it his brethren, defenders, and allies, yet also sees in it evil and hostile forces. Likewise in the realm of spirit, he takes both virtues and vices as something primordial. Indeed, fetishism, which exalted this or that natural phenomenon into a divinity, distorted the lessons of experience and labor by mixing them with myths and magic. All of that, in the end, outlived its day. But aside from that ordinary distortion, belief in mighty, luminous and benevolent allies—foremost the loving and holy Ormuzd—fortified the fighting Iranian farmer's confidence in his own strength as he contended with the elements and with nomads.

Mazdaism was, in embryonic form, a religion of labor; a religion that could not but be born under the shroud of mysticism.

Later, man would see that while in nature there may be phenomena beneficial and harmful to him, and things both beautiful and hideous, in truth there are neither "good" nor "evil"

phenomena, for they harm or help without any feeling or design. Therefore one cannot revere them as divine, cannot express thanks, etc. Science distills away fetishism from man's worldview. But so long as the help of the gods was needed, to strip spiritual significance from earth, sun, stars, wind, sea, seemed painful and sad. Only when man's own strength began to inspire trust—only among the advanced segments of humanity in our era—did gods become wholly superfluous and definitively discharged.

Christianity is undeniably inferior to Mazdaism on the cultural plane. Not for nothing did Emperor Khosrow scorn the Christians. For him, they were enemies of labor and lovers of idleness, men living in grime, afflicting their bodies by forgoing natural needs, turning their lives into a petty war against petty demons who lure them.

To deny that pure Christianity condemns labor, prosperity, and earthly progress is an act of hypocritical religious appeasement. All those typical Marthas, spiritual or secular, wear themselves out trying to reconcile the Christian negation of the world with their bourgeois concerns. They strip labor of any religious character, lifting their eyes heavenward and remarking that, of course, heavenly treasure is greater than earthly. And they distort Christian rigor for the sake of life's practical needs. What is labor, wealth, industry, saving, outside the shining principle of moving toward the perfection of the species, toward expanded creativity, toward freedom, toward a flourishing, upright life? What is any human labor on earth if it is not understood as building, as the transformation of the world by reason for the endlessly expanding enjoyment of a fine, strong, confident, bold, rational being that man is becoming? Outside that vision—outside the religious-philosophical understanding of economy—these are but *Mammon-service,* vanity of vanities. Yet these angelic Marthas dread acknowledging labor and wealth as the unique means of salvation, because then labor would say: If *I* alone save, and the goal is wealth (that is, the ability to fulfill needs broadly, to grow powerful by using the assets already produced by labor), then I am the lord, and the wealth belongs to labor, and labor must claim that earthly recompense for itself. "No, no," the pastors and professors and other Marthas all write, "virtue and modesty, patience, moderation, obedience—these are paramount; for them an imperishable crown is found. But labor? That's so trivial, just for the fleeting moment of an earthly life. You mustn't work to become rich, to enjoy and to grow, but so that those in heaven shall be pleased with you. They will pay you up in spirit. Wealth is even dangerous. Ah! Let us pity those poor millionaires—how can they enter the kingdom of heaven?" Pitiful Marthas, cumbered about with many things, yet timidly peeking at Christ, from time to time scurrying to him with a friendly word or a complaint about that lazy Mary.

But the laboring man scornfully shoves aside the half-hearted trifling of Martha and passes by the ecstatic exultations of Mary. He builds solidly, extensively. In the labor of building he discovers his delight. Fleeing the sorrows of life, he devotes himself to his tasks, laying stone upon stone for the kingly palace of a yet unborn descendant—his own dear scion—and says, admiring the work so far completed, finishing in imagination what is left undone: "If not I, then you." How much that is sorrowful, filthy, powerless shall pass into history when you enter this world, O shining new man. But bear in mind that your beauty has grown out of my suffering. Do not rest, do not languish on your laurels; press on, dream of something yet fairer. Our desires have no final limit. Let life flourish, let God dwell in the world. Let us erect reason's infinitely

sovereign spirit in the face of the universe's infinite diversity. Let the radiant figure of man-as-god rise upon the splendid, immeasurable plinth of the universe and the past—his beauty but faintly flickering in my half-animal imagination, sweetly stirring my soul (the soul of your ancestor), poor and weak yet strong in faith equal to yours, mighty, harmonious, equal to yours in its longing for the ideal and its self-sacrificial cry: "Ever onward!"

No religion has come so near to the nascent religion of labor as Mazdaism has. Zoroaster is one of humanity's greatest prophets. But the most precious part of his teaching is by no means inherited by the self-styled Zarathustra; he will not replace, with his dramatic and graceful posturing, the regal image of the Persian gazing far into the future, first to behold the new earth and heaven and man enthroned among them.

To find again that thread lost with the downfall of Persian culture, we must pass by marble Hellas, iron Rome, the dark Middle Ages, the restless Renaissance. Only in Bacon of Verulam's *New Atlantis*—one of the founders of empirical science—do we find an echo of this faith in labor and progress. Then further—Condorcet, the great Saint-Simon, Marx. A rising faith in labor, proportionate to advances in technology. A new approach to wealth and justice. The first chord of the finale to the tortured overture humanity has lived through.

The path of progress is broken and winding. Are we yet again at the threshold of the promised land, which our Moseses already glimpse from the mountain? Must we again turn aside into the desert for another centuries-long wandering?

Let us be keen-eyed, be bold, be active. We were born to live in a critical era; in that lies our curse, in that lies our bliss.

Anthropologism and cosmism in religion

In *The Essence of Christianity,* Ludwig Feuerbach draws a curious parallel between the religious character of the Greeks (Hellenes) and that of the Jews.

It is commonly assumed that Jewish monotheism is the highest expression of mystical spiritualism—that God is Spirit, infinitely distinct in every absolute quality from limited humanity. One God, at least in His later understanding among the Prophets, is a God that is least anthropomorphic. In contrast, who does not know that the Greek so closely identified the gods with men that the strange adventures and inexcusable weaknesses of the Olympians

became a scandal to minds of even modest refinement? And yet, the genuine representative of the anthropological type of religion—the creator of a purely human religion—turned out to be precisely the Jewish people, whereas behind the Greek gods that are so extremely anthropomorphic (and likewise behind their later Platonic and post-Platonic God-Spirit) the same *cosmos* lay hidden. The Jews, in their all-embracing, unfathomable Yahweh-Sabaoth, worshipped *human* nature; the Greeks, in their humanlike gods, worshipped the laws of a non-human nature. Greek religion is practically a kind of worship of man in *form,* yet in *substance* it stands further from man-worship than Judaism does. Judaism, taken at face value, is the religion of the enslaved man—of the man humiliated—but in essence it is the first form of a purely human religion.

In Feuerbach we find a notion like this:

> "Natural science is the deification of nature—idolatry in the sense of the Israelite and Christian God. And idolatry is nothing other than man's earliest contemplation of nature. But the Jews rose above idolatry to the cult of God—above the creature to the contemplation of the Creator—that is, they rose above the theoretical contemplation of nature (which beguiled the idolater) to a purely practical viewpoint that subjugated nature to the aims of egoism. 'And beware lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, thou shouldest be drawn away, and worship them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.' (Deuteronomy 4:19)
>
> Only within the unreachably profound and mighty depths of Jewish egoism could the idea have arisen of the world created out of nothing, of creation as a mere *imperative* act. That idea contains and expresses nothing other than the injunction not to treat nature as a subject of thought and contemplation but as an object for use and enjoyment."

Let us for now set aside the *forms* of these two religions, and focus rather on the *inevitable* inference from each. Judaism is the expression of a *practical* need: in it, man asserts this postulate—*rational spirit must rule over nature, powerfully altering it at will, delighting in it*. Hellenism is the expression of *contemplative* wonder, and its practical corollary inevitably reads: *nature is beautiful and mighty, she is her own end, her laws are sacred and immutable; man must bow respectfully before them, his happiness lying in that free submission: Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*.[1]

Discard the *form,* the deity, the theology, and what remains?

Pure *economism* with the formula "the subjugation of nature by man"—for Judaism, a scientific fatalism with the formula "the subjugation of man to the laws of being"—for Hellenism. The revolutionary conviction that *whatever is rational will become real*—that is the Jewish standpoint; the conservative conviction that *whatever is real is rational*—that is the Hellenic standpoint.

Hence, for the first, we find haughty human claims to kingdom and deity; for the second, a humble acknowledgment that man is only a dependent part. Feuerbach perceived this. Yet, carried away by his love for bright Hellas and its enormous cultural superiority—perhaps too by his hatred for the dominant religion, which is the daughter of the Jewish religion—he treated Judaism most unjustly in comparison to Hellenism. Here is a talented passage of his that draws a revealing parallel, letting us look deeply into the core of each religion:

> "The author of the Book of Wisdom (ch. 13) says correctly that the pagans, because of their astonishment at the world's beauty, did not ascend to the idea of its Creator. For him who regards nature as a beautiful being, it stands as an end in itself, the cause of its existence discovered within itself. The question 'Why does it exist?' does not arise. The concepts *nature* and *deity* become fused in his consciousness, his worldview. The nature he observes is for him something that arose, but not created in the religious sense—she is not the product of caprice, of workmanship. To him, 'creative force' is the primal force, and he holds that nature's foundation is nature's own power, tangibly operating before his eyes, as the cause of all things. Thus reasons the man who approaches nature *aesthetically* and *theoretically* (for initially theoretical contemplation is also aesthetic contemplation—*aesthetics is the prima philosophia*) and who identifies the concept of 'world' with the concept 'kosmos,' the radiance of divinity. Only where such a view animated man could a thought like Anaxagoras's be formulated: 'Man is born in order to contemplate the world.' The starting point of theory is a harmonious union with the world. But where man stands on the practical viewpoint and from it looks at the world, then he diverges from nature and makes it a docile handmaiden to his personal interests, his practical egoism. The theoretical expression of this egoistic, practical viewpoint, which regards nature-in-itself as naught, is this: *nature, or the universe, was 'created,' 'produced'; it is the product of a command.* 'And God said, let there be light; and there was light'—that is, God orders 'let a world be created,' and it arises at once by His word.
>
> "Utilitarianism, usefulness, is Judaism's ruling principle."

It is obvious that between Jewish willpower and faith in *volition* as the supreme power, versus Greek faith in *law* as the unyielding, commanding power, a *synthesis* is needed—one being developed by scientific socialism. But it is just as evident that the religion of the *grown man,* the religion of the *revolutionary* and *toiling man—the proletarian—*will align itself more with anthropologism than with cosmism. Indeed, one can confidently say that the *conservative* classes will, sooner or later, latch on to cosmism in order to counter the revolutionary will of the working man—citing unalterable laws, and to oppose the beauty of the ideal—strength, solidarity, justice—by the beauty of the eternal order, to oppose indefatigably active spirit with the poetry of wonder and contemplative renunciation.

Footnotes

1. “Fate leads the willing, drags the unwilling.” ↩

Trends in Judaism

Feuerbach attributes the Jews’ absolute monotheism to their tribal egoism:

> “God, according to Philo, granted Moses power over all nature; everything obeyed him as its master. The needs of Israel are made the almighty world law, determining the fate of the entire world. Jehovah – that is Israel’s acknowledgment of the holiness and necessity of its existence, a necessity in comparison to which the being of nature and that of other peoples is nothing. Jehovah is the welfare of the nation (*salus populi*), the salvation of Israel, to which all must be sacrificed; he is the exclusive, monarchical egoism, the all-consuming fire of wrath in the flaming eyes of vengeful Israel. In short, Jehovah is the *I* of Israel which sets itself up as the ultimate end and the master of nature. In exalting nature, Israel exalted the might of Jehovah and the power of its own self-awareness: ‘Praise God. He is God our helper. God our savior. Jehovah, God, is my strength!’”

Undeniably, that is largely true. The immense self-awareness, the near-superhuman stamina of the Jewish people, enabling them to remain an eternal nation despite the buffeting of destiny, that life-instinct grown among a living tribe in immeasurable deserts, strengthened in the holy wars for fertile land against settled Chaldeans, hardened under the fearful blows of conquerors—this robust, enduring instinct of a great yet small people found expression in the monstrous form of Jehovah. The lower the people fell in actual fact, the higher they elevated themselves in their ideal, in their God.

Yet it is not *merely* egoism that is at issue. The Semitic nomad, man of the desert, created his gods in the midst of an unvariegated, sparse nature—one neither lush nor richly varied. A broad dome of sky, carrying solemnly moving lights, arching over a uniform plain—this is the most remarkable sight he knows. And the stars themselves are but the luminous army of God, for there he rises, and his blazing face dominates magnificently, alone. The sun—Baal, Moloch, Melkart—displaces all other gods. Jehovah is their brother. James Darmesteter, a profound expert on Eastern religions, says: “Aryan and Semitic religions form two distinct groups. In the former, we find everywhere—under various names—the sky-god and the water-goddess, a rich polytheism deifying all forces of nature, a dualism of gods vs. demons nourished by the phenomena of storms, and entire hosts of graceful or perilous spirits. On the other hand, Semitic-speaking peoples strive toward a strict unity. Everywhere we see Baal, Moloch, or Jehovah, subduing the rest of nature by his blazing brilliance.”[1]

That Jehovah vaguely resembles a sun-god proves nothing. Monotheism arose from a broad, faceless animism. Desert spirits lack sharply defined individuality—they are *elohim* in general, *spirits in general,* who discover their lord—together with the rest of the spirits—in the boundlessly transcendent phenomenon of the sun. The majority of Semites stopped at sun-worship. But the tribe dwelling at the foot of Sinai (the Kenites) replaced in its religious imagination that terrifying yet calm deity with another no less majestic, yet more vital. Among those spirits, one stood forth: *the one who thunders in the awesome storms of Sinai, sending lightning*.

El of Sinai, the storm-god *Yagu,* the "One Who Is," was called on as witness to the covenant between the twelve tribes of the Hebrews. From that time on, he became the god of national unity. He inherited the greatness of a single god, acquired even grimmer and more living features, and became the God of the nation, in contrast to foreign gods and the local gods of family or tribe. Jehovah's quest for preeminence would be the quest of the principle of unity and independence for the newly formed confederation—a people—opposed to alien and separatist gods. We shall follow the later fate of Jehovah in the next chapter. For now, enough has been said to clarify the fundamental causes of monotheism, the props that enabled Israel to ascend to such a concept: a spirit akin to us, like us, loving us, our ally—greater than all the forces of nature, omnipotent. Their God of unity had to be exalted; political necessity, the very life of the people, demanded it. Every victory, every success the Yahwist faction credited to its God, but in the event of defeat, the people themselves were at fault. Their entire history was turned into a legend in order to preserve Jehovah's might. Thus did Israel develop its astonishingly fervent belief that a spirit, in the image and likeness of our spirit, surpasses alien forces incomprehensible to us—that he is the creator and master of nature. And the nations of the world accepted this comforting and proud proposition from Israel. "What a contrast!" exclaims Renan. "Instead of a living, animated nature, the Jews generated an image of nature that is barren and lifeless. How vast the distance between the rigid, austere notion of a solitary God, apart from the world, a nature merely 'manufactured' by him (like a pot by a potter), and the Indo-European theogony, which quickened and deified nature, perceiving in the universe an eternal flux!"

True, this conviction in the victory of reason, in the absolute power of spirit, of will, was bought at the cost of *alienating* it from man. Could man of that era speak of his own reason and will as if they were divine, commanding powers beyond the elements? Clearly not. One had to concoct a myth of a *super-will, super-reason, super-man*. Yet this was only humanity's colossal shadow flung upon the heavens. And moreover, it was the entire purity of his spirituality and his most human trait, his will to power. "Israel," says Darmesteter, "was certainly not chosen by God; *it* shaped him for itself by the sweat of its brow." As we shall see later, Israel's will to power, thanks to the nation's historical fate, was supplemented by the "thirst for justice." And the same process happened: Darmesteter rightly remarks, "The prophets spoke in Jehovah's name; the new world speaks in the name of human thought—but Jehovah was nothing other than the apotheosis of the human soul, human conscience projected onto the sky."

From all that we have said, it is already plain that the denigration of Judaism in comparison with Hellenism, which so strikingly emerges in Feuerbach, cannot be considered correct.

We must note, too, that Israel's survival instincts manifested not only in the nation's resilience and will to power embodied in Jehovah, but also in a profound realism. Only at a later, "decadent" stage did Judaism partly absorb the mysticism of other Eastern religions. Mysticism poured into Christianity on a great wave, ironically enough, from the joyous land of Greece. The "happy" Greece had begun decomposing well before the fatal wars between Athens and Sparta, adopting—partly from the east—the cult of the afterlife, indeed the cult of death as deliverance. We know that there too the hunger for life is revealed, fractured, scattered, deformed. As for Judaism, so inexorably logical in developing its fantastic concept of the Almighty, it was profoundly realistic in its conception of life. The distinction between soul and body was very ill-defined for the Jews. Life of the soul, detached from and after the body, did not interest them in the least. And yet they were the most religious people on earth and in human history. Renan rightly says of Judaism:

> "A mighty tradition of idealism and a paradoxical force of confidence dwelt in this religion, whose followers were ready for every sacrifice, despite being promised nothing beyond this earthly life."

And the Jewish religion, in a unique way, prevailed over the world. Noting Christianity's Jewish origins, Darmesteter goes on:

> "Muhammad, emerging from the school of Judaism and Judeo-Christians, founds Islam, whose dogma coincides with Jewish dogma, but is degraded in accordance with the narrower mind that reflected it. Islam's mythology is equally rabbinic and Judeo-Christian. Thus, from the seventh century on, two Jewish colonies occupy the domain of human thought—two colonies warring against their mother country, cursing and repudiating it. Not only do they persecute the followers of the mother religion, but what is far worse, each distorts its principles in its own way: the Christian West preserves its mythical spirit by injecting dogma and thus forcing science into silence or sacrilege; the Arab East transforms God from a law of reason to a regal caprice, soon producing passivity and ignorance."

Darmesteter firmly rejects the idea that Jewry has outlived its usefulness, that its historic mission ended with giving birth to Christianity. He notes the Jews' vast contributions in the Middle Ages. Precisely in the tolerant environment of Moorish culture, they preserved for us the best legacy of ancient Greek thought. Their lively intellect opposed dogma. Darmesteter vividly depicts Jewry's fate after the diaspora and its situation as bearer of the mother religion in a Christian world:

> "The peoples' hatred for the Jews was largely incited by the Church, yet the Church also tried to protect them from the storms it had itself roused. It needed Jews and likewise feared them: for Christianity rested on their book, but wasn't it alarming that they possessed the secret of that book, that they could judge the faith of their own judges? Sometimes a smile, a careless word shows that they condemn it and feel able to highlight its flaws or errors. This is the demon who holds the key to the sanctuary. Hence the priest's great dream: not to burn the Jew, but to convert him."

Historian Froissart naively describes Saint Louis of France thus:

> "He did a great foolishness (St. Louis) in establishing debates; for before the debates ended, many Christians wavered in their faith, unable to handle the Jews' objections. Then the King said that no one except learned clerics should dispute with a Jew; if a layman hears a Jew scorn the faith, he should not defend it by logic but by the sword, thrusting it into the Jew's belly as far as it will go."

A living faith would not handle a dead faith that way.

But Jewry, which cast off its Christian and Muslim branches—both syncretisms involving originally alien spiritual currents—did not cease its astonishing religious creativity. *Spinoza* was the founder of a new great religion.

How did it happen that the founder of the highest form of pantheism, the first true monist, was a Jew? I think James Darmesteter reached the heart of the connection of ideas: he notes the Jews' inclination to pantheism. Every Jewish philosophy, once freed from or outgrown belief in a personal god, arrives at pantheism: Kabbalah, Spinoza, Maimonides. "Monotheism naturally converts into naturalistic monism once God is dropped."

Spinoza made a colossal leap in two directions: purging the heavens of the phantom born of human imagination, and reconciling with nature. *Causa sui* was placed above will conceived as a whim or changeable arbitrariness. God's will was declared to be lawful. With that pronouncement, magic, myth, prayer, and miracles fell away. What remained was law, which man could know, and man's labor, craving to avoid evil, striving for good, which in Spinoza's view is life itself in its expansion.

Nature thus became a part of God—not His handiwork, not His garment, but His body, His lawful side (*attribute*). God is, in some sense, legitimized; nature is deified. Yet in Spinoza there remains the acknowledgment of moral character in substance—it is beneficent, worthy of reverence. By identifying God's will with the laws of nature, Spinoza's Judaism draws close to cosmism. His religion is imbued with serene love. Man kisses the garment's hem of the divine-substance. He must know his place. The reverence of the Jew merges with the Greek's reverence; the Jewish postulate of the living spirit's supremacy and the Greek's occasional rebellion are cast off.

Marx's doctrine is yet a higher synthesis. This was the fifth great religion formulated by Jewry. Once more, and with immense vigor, the Jewish realism asserted itself in scientific socialism. It contains no—and can contain no—transcendent ideas. It is the religion of the development of the species, the pursuit of power through organization, science, technology. Not in Bentham's self-satisfied "pleasure" approach, with his profit-and-loss account-keeping (which Marx scorned), not in mere *well-being,* do we see life's purpose, but in man's conscious cooperation toward humanity's progress.

Ultimately, in the eyes of scientific socialism, there is nothing higher than the human *species*. Either consciously or unconsciously, the progressive classes contribute to its progress, and

individuals, likewise consciously or unconsciously, follow their classes. Classes and nations are, so to speak, the organs or modes of all-human society, shaping its destiny through their struggles; individuals are modes—living expressions—of their classes, receiving from them their inner cast, their destinies largely determined by theirs.

That practicality which Feuerbach saw in Judaism and condemned is the very essence of scientific socialism. *To make nature man's servant*—indeed, that is the program of socialism! The struggle of reason with the elements, i.e. *orderly labor,* is, for Marx, the essence of history. Humanity finally recognizes the saving power of labor and will henceforth wage that struggle consciously, methodically, rather than blindly and chaotically, fighting itself.

We shall yet see how Marx, in one sense, is a continuator of the prophets' mission—as the herald of a thirst for justice.[2]

But Marx was by no means purely Jewish, nor could he be. The labor conception of life precludes a contempt for nature. Natural science no longer remains mere worshipful admiration, yet it does not lose a whit of its theoretical depth nor the beauty of its conquests and daring constructions by recognizing itself as the daughter of labor and awarding precedence to practical man over theoretical man. Reverential natural science is incapable of freeing itself from mythological principles, from fantastic hypotheses—only practical natural science, grasped as the need to orient ourselves among phenomena in order to master them (as Ernst Mach teaches), achieves genuine realism, ridding science of all subjective admixtures, establishing a worldview built on *pure experience* (Avenarius).

In the labor process, distinct from magic, nature plays a huge role. Not only must we understand it in order to struggle with it and conquer it, we must also *love* it. To love nature means to be able to extract from it the maximum of enjoyment—not only from the necessary "lower order" of purely physiological satisfaction, but from the realm of aesthetics as well. Man-as-master wants the earth not only economically improved but beautiful. Recognizing that it is man's only arena, and that the life of this our body is the only life, leads to love for the earth and the body, tender love, with a thirst to adorn and develop them. If the socialist's theoretical viewpoint is more practical than that of the idolater (i.e., the cosmic observer, the pantheist), the same must be said of his aesthetics: it is not the selfless love of a sighing worshipper, but the ardent love of a lover, a spouse. "Man is born to contemplate the world," says Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*. Is that not the pitiful note of a slave, seated at the threshold of his mistress's chamber, witnessing her toilette, her games, her delight in her own beauty—fawning in admiration, *not daring even to imagine* genuine love, an attempt to secure reciprocation? But Marx says: "It is not a matter of interpreting the world, but of transforming it." That is the voice of a man. Treacherous, soulless, mighty, dazzlingly beautiful, intoxicatingly rich—Nature, you yourself shall become the obedient servant; in you man shall find inexhaustible happiness, and even the outbursts of your rebellion, the abyss of your unfeeling cruelty, your fickleness as a mindless entity, O charming and grand goddess, the dangers of our union will enthrall man's manly heart. In seeking distance from the slave, his human brother oppressed, that wretched Nietzsche sought pathos. That pathos is found in the awareness of reason's greatness as measured against a nature immeasurably more powerful yet unreasoning, now lying at one's feet. Woman, as sister,

mother, and companion, Nietzsche wanted to make into a “dangerous plaything.” No, she shall share the throne of mastery, while the Universe itself—frightful and thrilling—becomes a “dangerous plaything,” lavishly spread around the divine pair called “humanity.”

Yet the most crucial synthesis to be achieved arises from the yawning contradiction between Jewish affirmation of the freedom of spirit, and its royal claims, and Greek assertion of the limitation of spirit and man’s dependence of consciousness on existence. Here is where the heart of scientific socialism beats. “It is not consciousness that determines being, but being that determines consciousness.” Previous philosophical systems strove to *interpret* the world; modern ones make it their aim to *change* it. Only one who discerns how these two principles unify in scientific socialism has grasped the core of Marx’s philosophy of history—Marx’s *religion,* as I call it. But this question is so immense, so vital in purely practical terms (as it powerfully shapes our instincts) that it warrants a separate examination. Opposites—individual and society, progress and justice, freedom and determinism—have been reconciled by Marx’s mighty thought. But in all the ferment of his publicistic work and in the colossal task of a profound, subtle analysis of the dominant phenomena and trends of our epoch, Marx cast only a flash of light upon the entire realm of religious philosophy. He channeled all his energies into the titanic labor of a genius vivisecting “Capital.” That labor provides the basalt foundation for scientific socialism. The plan of the building itself was drafted by the great teacher’s hand. Disciples must diligently and thoughtfully elaborate each part of the harmonious whole that remains under construction. And let not the true love of Marx, the awe at his genius, prevent the further growth of his work. The last great religion conferred by the Jewish Titan on the proletariat and on humanity must not crystallize into dogma.

Footnotes

1. Darmesteter, *Les Prophètes d’Israël*. The author notes that this division has only relative significance. ↩

2. See the end of the following chapter. ↩

Hellenistic tendencies

The Greek worshipped nature. That is, he loved it so much that he made it a god – he identified it with his ideal. The Greek humanized nature, attributing ideally human personalities to the cosmic gods, thereby deifying man. Not just *will* and *reason* alone, as the Jew did (and later Hellenism), but the whole man in his *kalokagathía,* his beautiful body and good character.

But in this chapter it is not that positive aspect—stemming from the Greek's active love of life—that interests us, but the opposite, negative side. *Negative* from our standpoint, of course.

We have said the Greek loved nature. But was he not also afraid of it? Indeed, he was. He did not fear the radiant sky or the "sea with curly waves," nor the blue-tinged mountains nor the spacious forests, but rather sickness, death, misfortune—the power of fate that inflicts disasters.

Almost every people has myths teaching that self-confidence, pride, longing for something better lead mortals to their doom. The Greeks, too, concluded that vanity and overconfidence are the root cause of sin and unhappiness. They invented the notion of the *envy of the gods*. One must not be *too* happy, their myths caution; the gods resent that. What later would emerge in the Cynics—the drive to reduce one's needs so as to lessen suffering—always lives in the Greek's soul. But in Cynicism, moderation itself is excessive. The Greek of his flourishing era wanted a *moderate* moderation. There is a fear of the boundless, a fear of too great a passion, even too great a wisdom—utter repudiation of what was later called Romanticism, that is, a repudiation of that impulse, that aesthetic which finds beauty even in the monstrous, for the sake of its strength. Classicism holds feelings in chains. *Sōphrosýnē*—prudence or self-restraint—is considered a cardinal virtue.

The great spokesman for this wariness of the unbounded, for this longing to remain in one's modest place in the world and avoid enraging the gods, was Sophocles. Through the mouth of his chorus, he exclaims:

> "Pride engenders tyrants and many,
> Leads them ever higher up to a precipice,
> Then suddenly, from that height, it hurls them down
> Into a net from which there is no escape,
> Into irreparable grief."

But if this dread of soaring too high was the soul of Greek poetry, politics, morality, religion, then is there not in classicism an undercurrent of dread for life? By no means. Neither in Herodotus, with his philosophy of history grounded in the "envy of the gods," nor in Sophocles, nor in Aristotle with his "golden mean," nor in Epicurus—nor indeed in any of the greatest representatives of the truly classical spirit—does one find a particularly stark note of gloom or pessimism. If the Greek feared the immeasurable, he did not love it either. He loved measure, he admired measure. Calling man to live within the bounds permitted by the gods—i.e. essentially within the laws of nature, hygiene, and society—he did not feel crushed by self-denial. On the contrary, he *took pride* in having a sense of proportion, in being able to institute order and voluntarily accept it, seeing in that a mark of his superiority over barbarians with their unbridledness.

The world is a lovely order, *kosmos*. Oh, if only the state (the *polis*) might be made equally firm and orderly—this dream enchanted Greece's greatest sages. Achieve the highest, most lasting order in social relations and then obey the wise laws of cosmic nature and social "cosmos," delighting in the world from the place assigned you by the general order, each man taking his lawful note in the common chorale—this is happiness.

Classicism is a spirit of conservatism, diametrically opposed to the spirit of rebellion. Classicism means a joyful resignation, man's reconciliation with his own limits in the name of affirming the beauty of the whole—that is, society (*polis*) and nature.

The impossibility of attaining a social cosmos shattered classicism. The intellectually culminating point was Pythagoreanism, about which we will speak further.

Plato, through Socrates in the marvelous dialogue *Gorgias or On Rhetoric,* proclaims "the great universal, eternal law of harmony, order, and beauty which rules all parts of the universe and their ends, because of which it is named the Cosmos. The point is not just to live, but to live well—that is, in conformity with the absolute laws of good, justice, and order."

Any individual right to rebel is categorically rejected as something monstrous. By its nature, classicism is anti-revolutionary; that is why it loathes tyranny, which is an unstable order: for every Pisistratus there is a Harmodius, for every Critias there is a Thrasybulus. A liberal constitution, a stable compromise of classes—this is what Hellenic political thought seeks. And the prospect of an eternal technological progress, the daring plan to proclaim man as the coming god of nature, to put forth the laws of his life and the fundamental desires of his will as the blueprint for labor in reshaping the material world—this is wholly alien to Hellenism. It is absent even in the theological or semi-theological forms that gave it expression in Judaism or Mazdaism.

Thus: no rebellion, whether social or cosmic, a docile man freely bowing his head. Even Aeschylus's Prometheus, in the end, is made to surrender voluntarily. The order already exists and reason already triumphs. If man cannot find happiness, so much the worse for him.

This is the spirit of *cosmism*. Thus it remained.

The eloquent mouthpiece of later cosmism, Renan, teaches:

> "Mental culture abolishes belief in the supernatural even at the lower level—that is certain. But it is equally certain that at the highest level it does not erase the religious feeling in its most lofty sense. Man is of course not dependent on a capricious lord who might at whim allow him to live or die, flourish or suffer. Yet he *is* dependent on the Universe, which possesses a goal and drives all things toward that goal. Man is a subordinate being; whatever he does, he worships and serves. Virtue is voluntary, joyful service of that higher goal. Evil is to serve without zeal, to be the bad soldier who, though compelled to go into the fire like everyone else, grumbles at the general. The world is a vast chorus in which everyone must sing his assigned note. Religion is doing your duty with a song on your lips, praising God morning and evening with cheerfulness, a fine disposition, and mildness (lack of demands)."

Renan is perfectly aligned with Anaxagoras and Cicero in seeing that man is born for a contemplative life. In one of his essays he states:

> "Religion has a purely ideal aim, independent of its practical benefits. The mission of humanity is to realize the highest form of contemplating the universe, i.e., of worship. Achieving that aim unavoidably—or let us say 'despite God'—involves a mass of suffering. Reducing that sum of suffering is certainly God's work as well, though of secondary importance. Man is not created for a life free of sorrow."

Is it surprising, then, that the clever bourgeoisie now clutches this mild contemplativeness? A professed counterrevolutionary, Lassard, in his *Histoire du romantisme en France,* brandishes Hellas and Wolfgang Goethe in the face of the "rebels." Isn't society part of the world? Are its laws not determined by necessity? He urges supplanting unbridled ideals and dreams of absolute reason and justice with the aesthetic spirit of rejoicing in the "whole," accompanied by self-sacrificial devotion to it.[1] Hence, by logic, classicism next takes up policing duties: it "recruits" men to serve "the fatherland," Monsieur Clemenceau, or any other *Majestät*, and it will not "let" dreamy mankind get carried away in the quest for the "chimera of happiness."

I already remarked that one can be "religious," in a rather crude sense of the word, while being a materialist. Atheist Haeckel calls for revering nature and extols it as "God" in his recent book: *Religion and Evolution*.

> "Our monistic god," he says, "is the universal being embracing all of nature—Spinoza's and Goethe's Deus-Natura. He is identical with the energy that eternally animates all things. He is far from foreign or hostile to matter filling space; rather, they unite together, forming a higher substance. He is omnipresent—just as the Gospels teach. Because we know that the law of substance is absolute and universal, that the conservation of force and matter is unassailable, that the continuous evolution of substance everywhere obeys the same great unchanging 'iron' laws, we may infer that God is simply the law of nature itself. God's will is manifested in the lawlike structure of the raindrop or the growth of a crystal, in the rose's fragrance and man's reason."

Hence, it's not hard to conclude that along with the rose's fragrance, the iron law of nature also produces society's structure, and a Haeckelian might calmly repeat the words of Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky [a character from Gogol's *Revizor*]: "All this is established by God, and the Voltairians speak against it in vain!"

Indeed, what is this human pygmy in the face of the cosmos?

Another leading *cosmist* exclaims:

> "To posit, as contemporary French schooling does, that nature lacks moral and intellectual principle, that matter is soulless—this is to commit a monstrous error that leads to a reign of brigands(!). Man is an inhabitant of a rather insignificant planet, heavy like a scrap of lead, tiny—millions of times smaller than the sun, which holds it in its rays. The sun, a million times bigger than Earth, is itself but a small atom of the starry cosmos. For instance, Sirius is more than a million times bigger than the sun, but Sirius itself is a mere speck in the infinity of stars, for the

> Milky Way, in its equatorial concentration, is made up of 18 million systems. This earthly man, infinitesimal upon the infinitesimal, sees, hears, and knows nothing. His pitiable organism is gifted with only five senses, of which four almost don't matter for knowledge since they detect only extremely nearby phenomena. Only vision gives him some knowledge of the universe. But what a meager knowledge! The optical nerve is only sensitive to vibrations ranging from 400 to 765 trillion per second. Below and above that range, nothing exists for man. He has no electrical nerve, no magnetic nerve, no orienting nerve, no single sense linking him directly to reality(?). And that trivial atom imagines it can pass judgment on infinity!"

See how many reasons to be supremely humble in our judgments? And once the universe is so vast, is it not plain that it must be rational? One can conjure a great many "scientific arguments" in support of that statement. And once you are permeated by a reverently trembling humility and the sense of earthly life's insignificance—no one will become an *apache*, so "the realm of brigands" will no longer threaten us, and the realm of the "Messieurs comme il faut" will endure. Joseph Dietzgen had no less a sense of the universe than Camille Flammarion, the popular astronomer beloved of spiritualist circles, from whom I quoted above, but he also knew what "spirit" is when empirically observed. He says: "He who acknowledges reason—this lever of all system and law—as a product of natural causation cannot ignore the systematic lawfulness of nature; yet the only actual 'spirit' in existence is the spirit of man. There is no consciousness in the stars' course or in the eggs of cuckoos; no understanding in the hive's construction or in the head of an ant or ape; only in the labors of human thought does consciousness merit the name spirit or reason. Our spirit is the highest being."

True, Dietzgen may have even been overly fearful that man would get puffed up and tear his spirituality away from nature, forgetting the actual connectedness of all things—but he knows well where to find the summit of the actually observed (not romantic-astronomical-spiritualist) universe. "From chaos, the world has evolved to man endowed with consciousness, on whom now lies a welcome duty and who is able to guide our still fairly chaotic earth toward further progress by exploring and organizing its forces."

I might simply ask one more question: only the earth? But the first step—would you not agree?—is the earth itself.

But if man's reason is the most rational reason that exists, where, then, can the priest (or at least the *priest* of science) latch on? He wants not only to proclaim truths dictated to him by universal reason—i.e., "revealed" truths—but also, relying on their indubitable authority, to uphold the reign of frock coats over blouses: he is so scared of *apaches*; and we know that the moment the "blouse-man" lacks a God, he becomes a "brigand." Science, in its cosmic form given a moral spin, is already functioning as the guardian of order, thus taking up police duty. The elder Bakunin foresaw that danger long ago—he detected the policeman-God even under the Phrygian cap forced on him by Mammon's prophets.

> "Thus, we revert once more under the yoke of Church and State. True, this new organization, founded by idealists, philosophers, and scientists and not by the 'grace of God' but supposedly by the people's will, will no longer be called a 'church' but a

> ‘school.’ But who profits by that? On the benches of that school it is not children who are seated, but—forever, with chronic minority status—its pupil, recognized by everyone as never able to pass his final exams, never able to ascend to the level of his teachers and get by without their drilling. This pupil is ‘the people.’ The State is no longer called a monarchy but a democratic republic, yet it remains a state: a guardianship of an officially, systematically organized minority of experts, geniuses, or talents, or the virtuous, who watch over and direct the behavior of that great, unredeemable, terrible child, ‘the people.’ Professors of the school and officials of the State will call themselves republicans, but they remain guardians and pastors, while the people remain what they were before, a herd. And where there is a herd, there must be shepherds to shear and devour it.”

And Paul Adam, in his response to a survey by the *Mercure de France* on the future of religion, formulates the following propositions:

> “(1) All the world’s past religions were only steps in a single revelation;
> (2) the secret meaning behind the common legends is *science*;
> (3) let us erect a ‘temple-museum’ for that entire totality of beliefs through which man evolved from fear-ridden anthropoid to synthetic-thinking scholar;
> (4) in those pantheons we’ll reinstate the old cult—some species of gratitude mass to the universal forces;
> (5) since the oldest cult was dedicated to the sun and fire, and since the newest revelation says that the source of life is motion–light–heat, let us create a ‘logical’ (i.e. laboratory-based) cult around lightning, as interpreted by the physicist-priest;
> (6) from biology, our preachers will sermonize morals and solidarity from the pulpit;
> (7) for convenience, we’ll try to clothe these sermons and ceremonies, as far as possible, in forms akin to our race’s Catholic worship. Such a religion seems to me entirely acceptable and responsive to the needs of our time. It would exercise a splendid influence on the mind and ethics of the masses. If I were to awake a century hence, I wouldn’t be surprised to find this cult the dominant one.”

Thank you kindly. Tell me, dear readers—isn’t that exactly what Bakunin was afraid of?

The bourgeoisie needs an indisputable hierarchy; for that it must establish a hierarchy *in nature*. And here man will *kneel* in worship (the “forms Catholic to our race”) before motion, light, and heat. In my view, worshipping a rooster, dog, or cow would be more rational. At least *they* have a small glimmer of reason. But warmth? What an idol. And thus man—his head full of brains, that most precious product of a tormenting evolution—will bow down before *heat,* which, in the chain of phenomena, is the most elementary form of manifesting that same energy that has reached its most complex, refined form in the functions of the cerebral cortex. No, the world is no monarchy, where men-slaves must humble themselves and give thanks to the Lord; nor is it a republic ruled by light and heat as the dignified senators, before whom little man has to bow. The world is *anarchy,* the world is the struggle of disconnected elements, a chaos tossed about, in which these forces find their place in ceaseless fight, in conquest, in destruction, in

transformation. That is why the world is cruel—there is no mercy in the struggle. And that is why the world is beautiful—a spontaneous coexistence of victorious forms able to live in the same space. The world is the highest form of democracy—"carrière ouverte aux talents," as Napoleon used to say. And soldier-man wants to be a general; he yearns for the marshal's baton and imperial crown. Man, in my eyes, is a genius arising from the pains and turmoil of fecund anarchy, just as geniuses emerged amidst the turbulent, fierce, splendid, and culturally stimulating communities of Hellas and the early Renaissance.

Stand up from your knees. Dare! All is possible to man. Possibly death; possibly apotheosis. Possibly "everything," or possibly "it's all lost." We want the masses to learn physics and biology, so they can use them, but let the physicist or biologist who dons a priestly cassock and ascends the pulpit proclaiming "revealed" truths about the necessity for man to stay humble in his desires and abide by the order decreed by some Universal Reason—let us drive such physicists and biologists from the temple of liberty and progress with rods!

In my view, it is plain that the tendencies to an ethical, aesthetic, "scientific" *cosmism*—religion that exalts a nonhuman god before man—are harmful and conservative. By contrast, the religion of the human species, trust in ourselves and our brothers, love for the future, ever more harmonious and mighty forms of man—this is a revolutionary force that shapes and forges souls and welds them together.

Footnotes

1. Plato in *The Laws* teaches: "The individual must not chafe at his assigned portion, for the whole exists not for the part but the part for the whole." ↩

An Outline of the Development of Jewish Religiosity

By common agreement, the Jewish people were the most religiously gifted nation. For us this means: they were the people with the strongest instinct for life. The harsh conditions in which Israel found itself forced it, for the sake of preserving its existence and self-consciousness, to embark upon grand, distinctive mental endeavors – separating out its own life from itself, locating it in the heavens, and exalting it there in proportion to its earthly abasement, each time assigning its sufferings to its own guilt and absolving its God from any blame, that God being the law of better days to come.

Because the Jewish political and outward cultural life was crushed – given their proximity to great imperial powers – intellectual and moral leadership fell to revolutionary or semi-revolutionary leaders of the small-propertied common folk fighting against "culture." Undoubtedly, the "sin" that ruined Israel was the aristocracy's attempts to follow the path of secular culture, which was necessarily linked (in that time) with predatory wealth accumulation and exploitation. If God ever forgives His people, it will be on account of the merits of the poor man, that long-suffering and steadfast slave of His.

Judaism not only fashioned from its own survival instinct a deity hitherto unheard of in terms of power and turned it into God punishing sins – with a view eventually to forgive and console a poor, guilty humanity – but also endowed Him with the traits of a champion of democracy and the poor. All of this made Jehovah into the ideal god of the world's suffering "riffraff." He did, in fact, become such after Christianity's "paganizing" and its adaptation of Judaism to the concepts and sensibilities of the Greco-Roman world. And the "riffraff" proved strong enough to impose its religion upon its masters. Yet the masters, alas, proved strong enough to ally with the priesthood of the new faith and twist it into a new rope with which to bind the poor man. *Wohlthat wird Plage* ("benefaction becomes a torment"). All this history has profound historical and religious interest.

On the one hand, the enthusiastic praise from some and abuse by others against the creation of Israel's great Jordanic prophets attests to its cultural importance.

Darmesteter, describing Judaism, says:

> "They (the prophets) proclaimed the right by force; they rendered the idea a fact in the face of which all other facts yield; they realized a common compassion for all the downtrodden, vengeance upon all oppressors, peace to the entire world. Through their faith in justice, they incited its progress in human history."

And elsewhere, still more exultantly:

> "They (the prophets) taught people to live without appealing to heavenly rewards. They taught that the future is merely empty tatters if it lacks an ideal; that this ideal is not conquest or might, but greatness of soul and the example of the best laws and morals. Amid the storms and tempests of the present, they painted on the sky the rainbow of a gargantuan hope, a luminous vision of a better humanity without evil or premature death, that knows neither wars nor oppression: 'then shall divine science fill the earth, as the waters fill the ocean basin'– a dream that has now also become the dream of many scholars."

On the other hand, Nietzsche thunders against the Jews:

> "For one to be able to say 'no' to everything on earth that represents a rising movement of life, success, power, beauty, self-affirmation, there had to develop an all too cunning instinct of *ressentiment* that conjured up another world from which any affirmation of life might seem evil and worthless in itself. By a psychological

> reckoning, the Jewish nation, the people of the most unyielding vitality, placed in an impossible situation, took the side of all the instincts of decadence – not because they themselves were mastered by them, but because they sensed in them a power by which they might stand fast against the 'world.'"

Both appraisals are partly right, partly wrong. The Jewish prophets indeed brought forth, with unparalleled vigor, the ideal of justice. Yet in reality justice-as-ideal was never "the fact before which all other facts retreat," never truly a *force*; it was merely a banner, an ideology belonging to a certain *power*, specifically the oppressed or self-proclaimed oppressed classes. And in this particular case, small property owners – for the prophets mainly expressed *their* interests. They never reached communism, toward which the propertyless naturally lean. The prophets furnished slogans and belief in God on behalf of petty-bourgeois revolutionaries. Justice was a force so long as those petty property owners *became* that force. It naturally aided them, as any well-crafted, beautifully elaborated, age-hallowed ideology does.

The prophets' ideology said that God-Justice, who is also God-Omnipotence, would assuredly grant full earthly happiness to men if they lived by righteousness, i.e., on the principles of equality in property and politics. But Nietzsche is correct too in emphasizing the anti-progressive character of prophecy. Progressive in a democratic sense, it was reactionary in an economic sense, thus also in a cultural sense. Yet that is the normal position of the small property holder, and to a Marxist there is nothing astonishing or unexpected in that.

The Pre-Prophetic Period: The Emergence of Yahwism

Orthodox exegetes accepted at face value the devout forgeries of later democrats and priests. Indeed, they benefited from doing so. In their view, the Jewish religion emerged fully formed from the hands of God and was given, in complete shape, to the Jewish people via Moses. Further, it was itself only a renewal of monotheism transmitted from Adam onward.

In reality, nothing of the sort. What is called the "Pentateuch" was produced by the prophets and their supporters, and was set in place (not without distortion) by the priests of Nehemiah's era and later ages. The original "Book of the Law" was that document which now bears the inaccurate name *Deuteronomy*. The *main* legislative part [of what we have today] was indeed a "second law" only to a significant extent.

Jewish religiousness advanced step by step, and its history of development is extremely interesting.

We have already said in the preceding chapter that the rise of Jehovah is rather obscure. All that is certain is that at first the Jews were "pandemonists," believing in a mysterious world of spirits—sometimes merging into one sea, sometimes breaking up into fleeting, vaguely defined waves of individuality. Since each notable place [a spring, a mountain, etc.] had its own god (*El*), then naturally the gloomy and majestic Mount Sinai, with its summit wrapped in cloud that at times rumbles and hurls lightning, was deemed the dwelling place of a great *El* or *Elohim* (*a plural form*), whom the little but energetic Kenite tribe called perhaps *Yagu* or *Yave*. This name was as indefinite as the visage of *Elohim* (the spiritual element; the Slavic word "bozhestvo" ["deity"] in the neuter somewhat conveys this concept).

It was that thunderous *Yave* whom the twelve related tribes, merging into a single people, made a witness to and guardian of their compact. A process precisely like what we see in Rome, where the merger of the tribe of Mars with that of Quirinus manifested itself in the elevation of the god of oaths, the god on high in the mountains seeing all and punishing criminals with lightning—Jupiter.

It is very possible that awareness of their unity—and with it, acknowledgment of *Yave* as the god of the newly formed small nationality—coincided with a struggle of the tribes to break free from Egyptian dominance. Possibly the brilliant leader, Moses, and his tribe—the Levites—did much to bring about this unification, being particularly zealous devotees of the new god, the god of unity.

But old tribal and clan gods—like the bull, the serpent, obvious totems (i.e., in effect "heraldic" identifiers of tribes, which became protective tribal gods), plus the *teraphim* (something akin to the Roman *Penates*), rivaled Yahweh for a long time. Priests—diviners using the fortune-telling instruments *Urim and Thummim,* and little idol-like items called *Ephods*—all of this divided the people's veneration with Yahweh. Every victory Yahweh won was a victory of the feeling of unity over separatism. And that sense of unity prevailed only in times of peril—during wartime crises. Hence the "Judges," the military chieftains who rallied the entire tribe's forces to repel a powerful foe (i.e., those Hebrew dictators) always took Yahweh's side.

During the lengthy wars brought about by the desire of the until-then nomadic people to seize the land and cities of the Canaanites, Yahweh's prestige soared. His "holy wars" (*milḥamot*) ended in victory. He truly proved to be *Sabaoth*—the "god of armies." In effect he was to the Jews both their Jupiter and their Ares.

Nevertheless, conquering the land did not put an end to bloodshed. The scattered tribes, uniting only around dictators, felt a need for firmer unity—they resolved to borrow from settled neighbors the institution of kingship.

Here contradictions arise. Samuel, the devout and brilliant Yahwist—that is, a nationalist—himself grants the people the king Saul. At the same time, according to later

tradition, he sternly castigates the royal power, painting for the people all the tragedies it would bring.

Were the Yahwist party already by then fully conscious of itself as *both* nationalistic and democratic? Or did that invective of Samuel against the king (as an engine of injustice and oppression) arise much later? In any event, a break between Yahwist nationalism and royal nationalism soon followed.

It could not have been otherwise. Kings needed a standing army, hence they demanded taxes. They encircled themselves with an aristocracy, and for their greed and grandeur they robbed the populace. Meanwhile, their refined lifestyle and unavoidable political alliances and dynastic marriages brought in foreign, naturalistic gods.

The Yahwists protested against the incursion of these new mores, destructive to the old individualist democracy. In their eyes, alien worship and the avarice of the strong naturally blended into one. Both were aspects of the commercial-industrial, military-state "culture."

Under King David, the capture of Jerusalem and other military successes on one hand, and on the other that kinglet's reverence for Yahweh—this thoroughly sentimental-yet-fierce, rapturous-yet-bloody man—still masked the abyss of class conflict.

The secular, pagan character of the state became fully manifest under Solomon. His hundreds of wives, palaces, and gardens, armies, chariots, ships, trade and colonies, his lavishness, and even the beginnings of a secular sensual poetry and natural philosophy with a worldly moral viewpoint—and, not least, the open cult of Astarte—all provoked outrage among conservative national-democratic Yahwists. But under him, they were forced to remain silent.

Upon his death, class struggle flared up like a blaze.

Class struggle

Renan paints Solomon's era of culture in such terms:

> "His alliances and religious tolerance, his sumptuous seraglio with seven hundred queens and three hundred concubines, the order and beauty of his court, the mercantile and industrial successes of his time: these awakened in people a taste for prosperity and the joys of life that Israel would happily indulge in whenever the spur of adversity was absent. *The Song of Songs* is a delightful reflection of that

> cheerful, blissful, subtly sensuous life that Israel experienced in moments of religious self-forgetfulness."

In the struggle between the kings and the prophets, Renan frequently sides with the former. "On one side," he says, "there is breadth of mind, eager to comprehend the world, to emulate other nations, to escape narrow confines; on the other side is a conservative mindset that, despite its limited perspective, served the welfare of humanity." Indeed, had "broad culture" triumphed, Israel would have been just one among many Semitic nations of culture. But it was crushed, enabling the victory of the people's revolutionary-reactionary elements.

In describing that "culture," Amos seethes with hatred:

> "Woe to those who deem the day of calamity far off, yet bring close the seat of violence;
> Who lie upon beds of ivory and lounge idly on their couches;
> Who dine on the best rams from the flock and on calves from the stall;
> Who strum away on the harp, imagining themselves to be David's equals at music;
> Who drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils –
> Yet do not grieve over Joseph's ruin!"
> (*Amos 6:3–6, loosely quoted*)

The prophets were revolutionaries in that they fought on behalf of an oppressed populace and sought a social overturning in the spirit of egalitarianism. Yet they were reactionary because they saw the ideal in the past, in the simplicity of customs and the patriarchal equality of the pastoral era. In so doing, they opposed economic progress, which was coming about through the concentration of land and capital.

Most irreconcilable of all were the so-called Rechabites. They refused even to dwell in houses and were repulsed by vineyards and wine, continuing instead to live in tents, shearing and milking their herds. These austere herdsmen were a pillar of support for the prophets.

Solomon's kingdom fell. The primacy of the tribe of Judah was overthrown; the tribes rallied around Ephraim and formed a new kingdom—Israel—in contrast with Judea. But the dynasty of the laborer, the stonemason Jeroboam, followed in the footsteps of the splendid Solomon. The struggle flared in both halves.

Under the gifted King Ahab, heavily influenced by Phoenicia, there arises the first great prophet, "the troublemaker of Israel" – Elijah. From the wilderness, where he lives half-naked, immense and fearsome, this poet and tribune goes to the royal capital. He mocks its priests, reviles the king's wife, threatens the king himself. Attacking foreign customs with all the force of his thunderous eloquence, he clearly indicates the social aspect of his preaching: in the typical example of Naboth's vineyard, he denounces the enrichment of some at the cost of others, condemns the concentration of wealth—especially of land.

The king stands in fear of that dreaded old man. In fits of anger he can only bid him depart from his sight, to avert further misfortune.

But Elijah's disciple, Elisha, though less impressive in his spoken force, was more unyielding and practical.

Small wonder he let a mother bear devour the boys who naïvely taunted his revered bald head. Together with the Rechabites, with devoted Yahwists Jehu and Jonadab, he carried out a bloody revolt, an armed uprising of those jealous for the old ways and the rights of a stiff yet freedom-loving peasantry. The Omride dynasty was annihilated. The beautiful and proud Jezebel was torn to shreds by dogs.

Yet all the horrors of an Oriental revolution led to no result. Immorality, idolatry, and the amassing of riches by impoverishing the poor continued unabated. To challenge with the sword that fateful process of "culture" proved impossible. Israel's kingdom seethed with passions, sufferings, ideas. Power had not yet gained firm footing. Overall, anarchy ruled the land. From without, fearsome Assyria threatened with its short, curved blade. Decadence above, a collapse of well-being below, a dominion of crass superstitions everywhere, and official worship of foreign gods—showing the dominance of Phoenician culture over what had been national-democratic trends—formed the backdrop for the preaching of the first true prophet, Israel's first mighty political writer: Amos.

He was a herdsman from Tekoa—that is, by the very nature of his livelihood an economic reactionary. Riches and power were his enemies. He douses them in caustic scorn, burns them with fiery hatred. In Yahweh's cult he sees his beloved people's only salvation. Yahweh is the God of the poor, God of justice—that is His essence.

> "Hear this, you who devour the needy and destroy the poor of the land, you who say, 'When will the new moon be past, so we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, so we may set forth the wheat—reducing the measure, boosting the shekel, falsifying the balances, to buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and to sell the sweepings of the wheat?' The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: 'I shall never forget any of your deeds.'"
> (*cf. Amos 8:4–7, paraphrased*)

For all these crimes, the God of justice will strike Israel's elite by destroying their culture and kingdom. Amos proclaims the same menace upon powerful, arrogant, predatory neighbors. Over the entire world of aristocratic militarism, the thunder of outraged justice resounds: "And they will cut one another down with swords."

> "You hate the righteous," Amos cries to the authorities, "you take bribes, you twist the justice for the needy in the courts. Seek good, not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord God of armies shall be with you, as you say. Hate evil, love good, restore justice at the gate. Perhaps the Lord of armies will pity the remnant of Joseph."
> (*cf. Amos 5:10–15, paraphrased*)

Finally, in magnificent words, he sets forth his democratic religion, expressing the very soul of his Yahweh:

> "Though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will pay no heed to your peace offerings of fattened cattle. Away from me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."
> (*cf. Amos 5:22–24*)

But this great poet, "roaring like a lion," no longer urges the righteous to action—only to patience. Sinners shall be destroyed by the sword at God's will; the people shall be purged, losing their proud and unjust rulers, and then better days will dawn.

The prophet Hosea, an almost exact contemporary of Amos, eloquently depicts the loveliness of a steadfast covenant with God:

> "In that day I will make for them a covenant with the beasts of the field, the birds of heaven, and the creeping things of the ground. I will abolish bow and sword and war from the land, so they may lie down safely. I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain and the new wine and the oil, and these shall answer Israel."
> (*cf. Hosea 2:18–22, paraphrased*)

Such times, he says, have been before. The people loved Yahweh, and he led them out of Egypt, gave them Canaan. No salvation exists apart from Yahweh—the god of the righteous, that is, the upholders of equality in a small-proprietor system. But now it is otherwise:

> "The Lord has a charge against the inhabitants of this land: There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. Perjury, deceit, murder, theft, and adultery abound, and bloodshed follows bloodshed."
> (*cf. Hosea 4:1–2*)

It is to Hosea that we owe those words "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Amos and Hosea have already created the lofty concept of God as righteous Judge, hater of the wealthy and oppressors, for whom justice and purity of morals far outweigh sacrifices and incense. Other prophets will vary these themes, which Amos and Hosea apparently inherited from their predecessors. Always true to itself, prophecy will be enriched with vital features by both nations' historical destinies. These changes will not distort the fundamental solution to the religious problem: happiness can be achieved by maintaining justice; suffering stems from iniquity that provokes the wrath of the Almighty Righteousness, and virtue cannot fail to be rewarded.

Isaiah

The first great prophet of the Kingdom of Judah was Isaiah. Unlike the prophets of Israel to the north, he was not entirely an opponent of the government. He succeeded in bringing the pious and godly King Hezekiah under his influence. From that came Isaiah's vast political authority. He kept a sharp eye on neighboring powers, and many of his prophecies were, in essence, distinctive diplomatic treatises.

But he did not neglect domestic policy. In Isaiah, politics, morals, and religion are indivisible. He combines a practical mind and lofty idealism with a remarkable literary and oratorical gift.

Isaiah's activity unfolded in tumultuous times. Despite being of noble birth, he appears to have become, while still young (ca. 740 BCE), the leader of the democratic-nationalist party in Judah – a prophet – and for some forty years played the leading role there.

He witnessed how the king of Israel, in a criminal move, allied himself with Syria against his own kinsmen in Judah. This was the height of faithlessness. Soon thereafter, the downfall of Israel's kingdom greatly boosted Isaiah's standing, for all along he had preached the justice of his God. Evidently Yahweh had punished Israel. Judah fervently set about purification. King Hezekiah, and even the official priesthood – generally hostile to prophets – fell under his sway. An energetic destruction of idols began everywhere, and a forceful promotion of Yahwism. The experienced hand of Isaiah was also felt in foreign affairs. He taught that the pride of the Judean people should never rest on a mania for war or a laughable rivalry with the colossal military empires. "The people of God," he insisted, "must shine by the justice of its laws and the purity of its morals, and by that it will someday prevail over the world. For now, be prudent." Isaiah was the first to push for an alliance with Babylon, which the prophetic party later made its traditional policy for some time. That allowed Judah to wage successful campaigns against weaker neighbors. Within and without, Isaiah witnessed success. A storm darkened over his head when the Assyrian Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem. But plague breaking out in the Assyrian camp forced him to withdraw – yet another triumphant display of Yahweh's power and of Isaiah, his servant.

Isaiah's democratic leanings are sufficiently clear from the vigorous things he says:

> "Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field until there is no room for others, as though you alone inhabit the land!"
>
> "The Lord will cut off from Israel both head and tail, palm branch and reed, all in a single day: The elder and man of rank—these are the head; and the lying prophet is the tail."

Yet Isaiah was able to work out a practical compromise with the aristocracy; that may explain why he speaks of "lying prophets." Could they have been the intransigents? Isaiah loved and exalted Hezekiah; he spoke of him in terms later taken as describing the Messiah:

> "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shone. Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy. They rejoice before thee as men rejoice in the harvest, as they are glad when dividing the spoil. For the yoke that burdened them, and the staff that struck them, and the rod of their oppressor – thou hast broken them as in the day of Midian. For unto us a child is born, a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Lord, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it in judgment and justice from now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this."

He reacted to his successes with a near-mad rejoicing and hope. Judah quivered in the first flush of fortune's favor. As he described the past and imminent wars of Hezekiah and his heir – "they will swoop down upon the shoulders of the Philistines to the west, they will plunder all the children of the East, they will extend their hand over their neighbors," etc. – Isaiah abruptly rises above those glimpses of petty, predatory policy by the triumphant Judahite kings, and ecstatically depicts a truly messianic vision. Once Judah's king becomes just, all life will be transformed:

> "He will gird his loins with righteousness and clothe his sides with truth. Then the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the goat, the calf and the young lion, and the ox shall be together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The infant shall play near the asp's den, the toddler shall put his hand into the viper's nest. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Certainly these were metaphors for social peace, but their sheer grandeur extends Isaiah's promise regarding the pious Hezekiah and his descendants, and sets before the eyes of awestruck humanity far-reaching, shining, golden horizons. Later on, Persian grandiose Messianism would find fertile ground among the disciples of Isaiah the Great.

The ideal surpassed politics. While delighting in how the Judeans would plunder the children of the east, Isaiah also extolled an age of peace, rising to the level of internationalism – and all by virtue of his two basic principles: "No god is stronger than Yahweh" and "Yahweh is the god of justice."

Democratic nationalism was the root on which one of the greatest ideals grew.

> "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more."

Isaiah is certain that the blame for wars, and indeed for other sufferings, falls on the pride of the martial aristocracy:

> "The lofty eyes of man shall be humbled, and the proud shall be brought low; the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts is upon every proud and lofty man, upon all that is exalted, and it shall be brought low."

If Isaiah allied himself with royal authority, it was because the throne submitted to him. The king became the Lord's instrument in the struggle against the nobility:

> "The Lord will come to judge the elders of His people and their princes: 'You have devoured the vineyard; what you have stolen from the poor is in your houses. Why do you crush my people and oppress the poor?' says the Lord, the Lord of hosts."

In Isaiah, one still hears, despite his triumphs, another theme of prophecy: the righteous must be patient, for though they will be rewarded, society must first be cleansed of wickedness, and that means a necessary season of suffering. Thus about the righteous man Isaiah says:

> "Lord, in trouble they sought Thee; they poured out hushed prayers when Thy chastening came upon them. Like a woman in labor, writhing and crying out in her pangs, so were we before Thee, Lord. We have been with child, we have felt labor pains—but we gave birth, as it were, to the wind; we have not saved the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world recognized us. Yet Thy dead shall live, their corpses shall arise. Awake and sing, you who lie in the dust, for thy dew is the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

All these themes the heirs of Isaiah will expand upon – especially that great unnamed prophet of the age of Cyrus, who modestly and proudly appended his sublime "poem of consolation" to the radiant, image-filled legacy of the brilliant counselor to King Hezekiah.

Jeremiah

The hopes Isaiah had pinned on Hezekiah's descendants were not to be fulfilled. His son Manasseh permitted an aristocratic reaction, which sparked the fierce opposition of the Yahwist party, now a formidable force. It is possible King Josiah, the candidate of the Yahwists, rose to

the throne by a violent coup. Under that king, the prophetic party led by Jeremiah, the prophetess Huldah, and the high priest Hilkiah strove feverishly to fortify the democratic social order.

Jeremiah himself was a priest. Renan, in the third volume of his *History of the People of Israel,* characterizes this man as follows:

> "His religious character is more sharply defined: in him, the tribune bows to the priest. Amos, Hosea, at times Isaiah, surprise us with the daring of their thought, their love of the people, and their indifference to questions of doctrine and worship. We are dazzled by their noble wrath. Seeing how unjust the world is, they are ready to smash it. They think somewhat as our anarchists do: if the world cannot be improved, it must be destroyed. Jeremiah is far less concerned with social issues and the victory of the democrats. He is a fanatic, brimming with hate for his enemies: to him, anyone who disbelieves his mission is base, and he calls down death upon them, proclaiming it as their fate."

Darmesteter, however, deems this appraisal unjust. He says:

> "In Jeremiah, as in Isaiah, the prophet who reforms the moral, political, and social life takes precedence over all else. Admittedly, his character is singular, but so too were the circumstances under which he lived and taught. Jeremiah is the natural and rightful heir of Isaiah, but with a biting disposition, an iron conviction, an unconquerable courage, full of scorn for any prejudice—however venerable or famous—that is precisely what makes him a striking figure among a striking group of prophets. He did not live in relatively fortunate times, like Isaiah. The terrible hour arrived, an hour of irreparable mistakes and definitive catastrophes."

At the start, however, Jeremiah, during the youth of King Josiah, played Isaiah's role. But his hope for a lasting social reform (on which, see below) was not realized. Jeremiah loved the young king, the king obeyed him without question. "Alliance with Babylon for the land's salvation externally, and a land reform within, to strengthen the Kingdom of Yahweh-Justice"—such were the slogans of the prophetic party. When Pharaoh Necho marched his forces against Babylon, he did not wish to harm Josiah. But the impassioned Jeremiah believed it imperative to seal the alliance with Babylon. He trusted in Yahweh's help for the devout Josiah, the hope of the righteous, and urged him out to meet the Egyptians. In the battle with Necho, Josiah was defeated and came back to Jerusalem to die, lamented by the poor among the populace. Jeremiah's sorrow was boundless. Hopes had collapsed. The conclusion was not that Yahweh had betrayed His people, no: for Jeremiah it was plain that it was still too early for the people to be saved—too sinful, not yet sufficiently chastened to atone for its guilt.

Jehoiakim paid no heed to the prophets. His entourage leaned toward Egypt, planning to rebel against Babylon. There was no shortage of prophets inciting revolt, promising Yahweh's help. Jeremiah hated these proud secular notions—he knew Judah was blindly heading into a pit, and when, despite his protest, the revolt broke out, was crushed, and new tax burdens weighed upon the people, he unleashed a wild eloquence against the court:

> "Therefore thus says the Lord regarding Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, my brother! Alas, sister!' They shall not mourn him, 'Alas, master!' and 'Alas, his majesty!' With a donkey's burial shall he be buried—dragged out and cast beyond the gates of Jerusalem. As I live, says the Lord: were Coniah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, the signet on my right hand, yet from there I would tear him off and hand him over to those who seek his life, to those you fear, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the hand of the Chaldeans. I would hurl away both him and his mother who bore him, into a foreign land where they were not born, and there they shall die. But to the land their soul longs to return, they shall not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel or a thing of no value? Why have he and his seed been cast aside and tossed into a land they do not know? Thus says the Lord: Write this man down childless, a man ill-fated in his days, for none of his offspring shall ever again sit on David's throne, ruling in Judah."

Zedekiah's reign was unsteady. For a time, at the urging of the democrats, he decided to free the slaves, instituting henceforth their liberation after a set term of service. But the nobility rose up, and Zedekiah withdrew his decree. Jeremiah hurled in the new king's face: "You have returned your brethren to slavery; you refused to proclaim liberty. I therefore, in the name of Yahweh, proclaim against you the liberty of sword, pestilence, and famine!"

The break was total. But now the people also turned against Jeremiah, who prophesied nothing but miseries, taking from them all heart and hope.

When fresh war with Babylon flared, Jeremiah stubbornly declared that Jerusalem must at once surrender to the victor's mercy. Commanders complained that beneath the cries and baleful croakings of this dreadful man in mourning attire, it was impossible to defend the homeland. They threw him in prison, dropped him into a cistern so that he sank in mud up to his neck, but still he went on prophesying an endless chain of disasters. He had forsaken every worldly hope in the mighty and the rulers, relying only on God. Suffer, suffer, suffer—this is the sole path of purification. Let all burn, let everyone burn…so that rebirth might follow.

Everyone recoiled from the fanatic who would ruin his own generation, handing the nation over to a thousand plagues for a distant, uncertain future. Jeremiah himself suffered unspeakably in his isolation. Outbursts of grief burst from him:

> "Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me—a man who contends and quarrels with all the land. I neither lent on usury nor have men lent to me, yet all curse me. Cursed be the day I was born, the day my mother bore me; let it not be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, saying, 'You have a son,' thereby gladdening him."

With a bitter reproach he turns to God himself:

> "You enticed me, Lord—and I was enticed; You were stronger than I—and You prevailed; but now I am ridiculed all day long, everyone mocks me."

Jeremiah laid a great cornerstone in the edifice of a religion that teaches redemption by suffering—one destined to become the faith of the Roman world's democracy and to exert a colossal influence on mankind for two and a half millennia or more, all stemming from the preaching of a passionate, suffering patriot along the streets of the little, troubled, besieged Jerusalem.

The Law of Moses

The book of *Deuteronomy* was "found" by the high priest Hilkiah.[1] In other words, it was composed by the clergy, specifically that faction of it pervaded by the principles of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

It is uncertain whether by that time the Jews had any written legal compendia. Amos, indeed, mentions that Yahweh gave Israel "important laws" that, however, are not being observed. Since a ritual code meant little to the shepherd from Tekoa, one may suppose he refers to moral and social laws composed at an earlier period and bearing in general a Yahwist character—i.e., defending the equality of a primitive agrarian economy and the patriarchal severity of morals.[2]

In any case, *Deuteronomy* was the first *complete* legislative book. From it developed the entirety of the Mosaic legislation inscribed in *Exodus* and *Leviticus*, likely in the time of Ezra.

Deuteronomy is the loftiest of the legislative books. The spirit of Isaiah still breathes through it in all its purity. Naturally, the prophetic party, to enhance the impact of this work, attributed it to the man who led the people out of Egypt, the first great prophet of Yahweh, the patron of that entire movement.

Mosaic legislation reveals to us the socio-economic program of the prophets.

It sets out, in ideal form, from an assumption of equal shares of land ownership, i.e., distribution of land on egalitarian lines. But from experience, it knows that an egalitarian division inevitably leads in due time to inequality, wealth and power in the hands of some, while the rest sink into poverty and servitude—and so the lawgiver adopts a series of decisive measures.

One can scarcely characterize these better than by quoting the praise of a modern leader who champions the nationalization of land:

> "If you trace the reason that gives rise to want in the midst of abundance, to ignorance amid enlightenment, to aristocracy amid democracy, and to weakness amid swelling powers, which pushes our civilization to a lopsided and shaky growth, you'll see it is precisely what that great statesman perceived and sought to eliminate three thousand years ago.
>
> Moses saw that the true cause of the enslavement of the masses in Egypt—indeed, the cause by which masses are everywhere enslaved—was the transformation of land, from which and on which all men must live, into the exclusive property of a single class. He saw that allowing for land the same unlimited property rights as would naturally apply to the products of human labor would inevitably split the people into the very wealthy and the very poor; it would inevitably enslave the laborers, make a few men lords over many, whatever forms of government existed, producing vice and moral downfall, regardless of the people's religious beliefs. With the foresight of a thinker and a statesman who frames laws not for the needs of a single day but for the endless generations to come, he strove to avert this misstep by whatever method suited the conditions of time and place.
>
> Everywhere in Moses' statutes, land is regarded as the gift of the Creator to all His creatures alike. No one has a right to seize it for exclusive possession. Nowhere is it spoken of as 'your estate,' 'your property,' or 'land you have purchased or conquered.' Everywhere it is called 'the land that the Lord your God gives you to inherit,'—'the land that the Lord gives you for a possession.' By way of concrete legislation, using decrees endowed with the supreme sanction, he strove to prevent the very injustice that made the ancient civilizations hotbeds of despotism, the injustice which in later centuries devoured the heart of Rome, spawned a mad serfdom in Poland and dire ruin in Ireland, that same injustice which drives working families to swarm in city slums and litters our new states with vagrants. He not only secured an equitable partition of land among the populace, freeing it for communal use each seventh year, but also established Jubilee years, ensuring the land was periodically redivided every forty-nine years, thus making its monopolization impossible."[3]

In their socio-economic program, the prophets supported democratic justice, even at the cost of cultural decline. Leo Tolstoy is a faithful disciple of theirs, a pure Mosesist. But the revolutionary socialists are scions of the same root. This is understandable. The ideology of the petty proprietor struggling against capital always remains the same: artificially arrest the forward motion of inequality. Awareness of the necessity of capitalism as a cultural force is beyond the petty proprietor's grasp. "I humbly thank you for your 'culture,' Mr. Marx. I bow to your economic rod, but I have no intention of building a bridge for this 'culture' out of my own bones." Yet, alas, the sorrowful bridge is built nonetheless. And there is no other bridge to the ultimate victory of true justice. That justice shall descend on the earth—or rather bloom upon it—only on the soil of wealth. And for that, labor must be organized. Yet labor can be organized only through the colossal ventures of private millionaires, or companies, or the state. If God existed, one might curse Him just for this chasm that humanity is filling up with its corpses. But

there is no God—only an implacable nature that will not stoop to serve us. We must defeat it. Suffering is unavoidable. We may try to lighten it, but to recoil, dreading this cup, is both cowardly and in vain.

The prophets had a grand excuse: the culture of their time, though of artistic and scientific value, promised no near redemption. Tolstoy's followers lack that excuse. Their only defense is historical-philosophical blindness. As for the revolutionary socialists—two souls begin warring in their breast the more they appeal not just to peasants but to proletarians as well. The abler, more sensitive, and braver of them will end up joining ranks with proponents of scientific socialism; they will discard utopias, helping manfully and with intellectual honesty in tackling the vast, still far from exhausted agrarian question from a socialist perspective. Others remain ensnared in the hopeless contradictions of the petty-bourgeois worldview.

Let us now return to that precious chain of great prophets.

A series of chapters—starting around chapter 40 ("LI" in the text—apparently a slip; actually "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" is *Isaiah* 40)—in the Book of Isaiah were written by the great prophet-poet who lived in Babylon, where almost all the Jewish intelligentsia was carried off after the destruction of Jerusalem.

One hundred and fifty years had passed since Isaiah's death, but his spirit lived on and continued to develop. Once more, fortune smiled on the sorely tested people. King Cyrus showed them kindness and took them under his mighty wing. And once again Israel answered fate's favor with exultation. Might the time be up? Might not the gladsome days of grace now be dawning?

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says our God." Thus begins the Deutero-Isaiah. "A voice crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a path for our God; every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low, the crooked ways made straight, the rough places level. Climb up upon a high mountain, O herald of Zion; lift your voice with power, O herald of Jerusalem; lift it, fear not. Say to the cities of Judah: Behold your God. Behold, the Lord God is coming in might, and His arm rules for Him."

"Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense goes before Him."

What joy, what exultation!

Cyrus is eulogized with rapture: "Who stirred up from the east that righteous man, summoning him to follow, delivering nations to him, subduing kings? He turned them to dust by his sword, to windblown stubble by his bow. He pursues them, passing on in peace by a way unknown to his footsteps. I have roused him from the north, and he will come; from the rising sun he calls upon My name; he treads on princes like mud, and as a potter tramples clay."

The prophet addresses his glad tidings—these shining horizons—to the poor first, consistent with the tradition of prophecy: "The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to

bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and the opening of prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

In splendid images he glorifies the near future of Jerusalem: "Arise, shine [Jerusalem], for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick gloom the peoples, but upon thee the Lord shall rise, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy dawn; lift up thine eyes all around, behold: they gather, coming unto thee. Thy sons come from afar, and thy daughters are carried on the side. Then thou shalt see and be radiant, thy heart shall tremble and grow wide, for the wealth of the seas shall be turned unto thee, the riches of nations shall come to thee. Who are these flying like clouds, like doves to their dovecotes? The isles shall await me, and leading them the ships of Tarshish, to bring thy sons from afar and with them their silver and gold, for the name of the Lord thy God and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified thee. Then sons of foreigners shall build up thy walls, and thy gates shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and that their kings may be led."

Such are the perspectives of earthly greatness and economic prosperity for Jerusalem—Solomon's era shall return a hundredfold, only now as a reward for righteousness, not as the spoils of a war-trade aristocracy. Justice will blaze forth in Jerusalem:

> "Lo, I create Jerusalem to be a rejoicing and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people. Never again shall be heard in her the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No longer shall there be an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man that fails to fill out his days; the hundred-year-old shall die a youth. They shall build houses and inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build so that another dwells, nor plant so another may eat; for the days of My people shall be as long as the days of a tree, and My chosen ones shall enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not toil in vain nor bear children for calamity; for they are the seed of the Lord's blessed ones, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, but dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord."

The emphasized phrases plainly express a small-proprietor ideal—a vision of independent, working peasantry and townsfolk.

Yet it is not in this that the prophet's real greatness lies. His greatness lies in the astonishing concept—more precisely, in the extraordinary transformation of the fundamental prophetic concept: for the humility, patience, and suffering of the righteous—i.e., the poor stratum, the suffering class among the suffering people, the class not guilty of sin in the forms of pride, greed, or perversion of justice—God will exalt His people. What's more, the immeasurable woes of Judah's plebeians will redeem all mankind. Here we meet a fully developed form of what might be called moral "magism": nature depends upon God, so man's well-being likewise depends upon Him. We must influence God's will—this matters far more than trying to master nature by

labor. But to influence God's will through sacrifices—futile, indeed wicked. Not sacrifices, not rites, but the upholding of social justice is the magic means to become the sons of God and masters of nature.

The famous passages that treat these ideas would later be applied to Christ and partly served as a framework that predetermined many of the so-called biographical features of the Gospels.

The Suffering Messiah—this is the great idea; the poor, humble, humiliated Messiah, whose words therefore blaze all the more brightly: it is the majestic, world-historical variant of the Cinderella or Ugly Duckling story.

> "Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My spirit upon him, and he shall bring forth justice to the nations. He shall not cry aloud nor lift up his voice, nor make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice, he will not grow faint nor be discouraged, till he has established justice on earth, and the coastlands shall wait for his law. I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, I will hold thy hand and keep thee, I will appoint thee for a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."
>
> "Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. Many were amazed at thee—for his appearance was so disfigured more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men…"

All this refers to the righteous part of the Jewish people—but the Christian messianism is already built. Paul's only task is to put, in place of the symbolic "servant," Yahweh's "eved," a crucified herald of the prophets' great truths, recognized simultaneously as the Son of God, making him "the atoning sacrifice" of God himself, adding to his achievements victory over death. Undoubtedly that is much. But that "much" was only the layering on of Hellenic religious ideas and traditions atop Deutero-Isaiah's grand democratic redeemer-sufferer.

It's unnecessary for us to follow further the fate of Jewish religion. Starting with Ezekiel, the conservative priestly spirit, eager to transform everything into law and letter, gained ascendancy over prophecy. Creative activity faded. The guardians of tradition, once the aristocrats of the sanctuary had become heavily Hellenized (the Sadducees), were the scribes—the Pharisees.

John [the Baptist] and Jesus were likely the late flowering of the prophetic spirit. In their preaching, once again rang out notes of spiritual freedom. But they were spurned by the stolid majority. And the Gentiles, who did receive them—thanks to a peculiar turn of events—ended by transforming them beyond recognition.

But the influence of the prophets' central work—the best part of the Bible—did not cease. Time and again, the Old Testament was renewed, and ultimately it merged its waters into the sea of the new religion: the religion of Labor.

Footnotes

1. *Circa* 600 BCE. ↩

2. Most likely these ancient laws, which Ezra in 444 BCE incorporated into *Exodus* XX–XXIII, and possibly the Decalogue, which is very old (although two Decalogues are attributed to Moses). ↩

3. G. George, “Moses as a Social Reformer.” ↩

---

1. За 600 лет до Р. Х. ↩
2. Вероятнее всего это те древнейшие законы, которые были включены Эздрой в 444 году в книгу «Исход» XX–XXIII, может быть и декалог, который очень древен, хотя Моисею приписывают два декалога. ↩
3. Г. Джордж. «Моисей, как соц. реформ». ↩
4.
5.

The Biblical Spirit and the Religion of Work

Throughout history, the biblical spirit has generally manifested itself more on the side of the concealed longing for justice than on the side of the longing for might. God is justice; He is the adversary of predatory rich men, the champion of poor landowners, the friend of equality. Hence He grants victory to the virtuous, the temperate, the hardworking representatives of the lower strata over the immoral, splendid, proud, and God-forgetting upper classes. This conception repeatedly made Sabaoth the leader of revolutionary peasantry. Throughout the Middle Ages, there were occasional attempts at protesting the arrogance of exploiters—ecclesiastical or secular alike. In the seething and varied movement of the Reformation, we see numerous sects that drew upon biblical tradition and went further than Luther, that lackey of the princes.

Thomas Müntzer was a genuine heir of Elijah, an authentic prophet. Naturally, the have-nots find less direct support in the Bible than do small proprietors. They cling more ardently to the communism of earliest Christianity. Such was the case in the great Puritan upheaval as well. Still, the core mass of revolutionary forces in England drew their inspiration wholly from a prophetic ideology. Yahweh rose up against the wealthy and the noble and smote them. But He also dealt harshly with the communists, the Levellers. Yahweh is the God of small-proprietor justice.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was likewise a prophet in the biblical mold. Thirst for justice is at the heart of his social-philosophical thought. Like Elijah, he thunders against culture; he sets up popular rule, in which, as the Jewish philosopher Salvador of the 19th century observes, one finds echoes of the "ideal" democratic constitution of ancient Israel, as expressed in Moses's institutions—[namely] a popular assembly that may freely accept or reject even God's own proposals, which, once accepted, become the categorically binding law. Not "culture" but morality, not the progress of the sciences and arts but equality, not the moneylender's ever-snowballing wealth but the working property of a bucolically depicted peasantry.

The Great Revolution [in France] was not merely a revolution of the industrial-trading bourgeoisie, stretching out the limbs that had grown stiff in the Procrustean bed of the old regime; it was also a petty-bourgeois revolution, above all a peasant revolution. Though the Jacobins, like the Girondins, liked to masquerade in the togas of Roman tribunes, they could not hide their prophetic garb with that purple. Robespierre could not forget Yahweh. Even the merciless spirit of the Terror bore traits of biblical fanaticism: "Exterminate, exterminate the sinners," says the Lord, "that my people may be saved."

Jehu and Jonadab, Rechabites, stern and fiery Elishas, sprang back to life under clothes à la française. The Salvador mentioned above is not mistaken in detecting in the principles of the Revolution the triumph of Jewish prophecy. "Long did the prophets struggle against Baals, Zeus, Christ—at last they glimpse the approach of their ideal. Great Paris and wretched Jerusalem now clasp hands."

Yet the ideals were still far from realized. As always and everywhere, equal land usage—egalitarian smallholding—which the defenders of righteousness were prone to demand, did not take root. Even the peasantry—at least the better-off portion—did not adopt it. The impetus of capital, never before facing such enticing horizons, never before sensing so much vitality in its muscles, simply stepped over the heads of these righteous zealots, and Satan, with his rallying cry "Get rich, rise up, conquer," once more triumphed over the God of justice.

The ancient-prophetic style no longer even reflects justice at all; the ideals of Deutero-Isaiah cannot satisfy the democracy of industrial society, for they are ideals of an agrarian democracy.

Still, in the essential relationship, little has changed. The socialism of the early decades of the 19th century willingly linked itself to Luke's Gospel, that is, to the biblical spirit. Socialism demanded justice, no matter what. Capital's apologists retorted with "progress." "Your progress is worthless," repeated both the pure supporters of petty-bourgeois interests like Sismondi, and the first new-type socialists such as Leroux and others. "Your progress brings ruin, exhaustion,

degeneration." "But your justice halts the forward surge of humanity's forces," the economists replied.

That was the last phase of the struggle between Satan and God. Satan's principle—beginning with the story of the apple, going on through Cain and his progeny, Nimrod and his tower, Solomon, Ahab, the Greek aristocracy of the mind, the Roman aristocracy of the sword and justice, the divine Augustus, Lorenzo the Magnificent and the Borgias, down to modern capital's millionaires and machine-builders—that principle was: wealth, power, beauty, science. Listening to him, man climbed higher, treading on the backs and heads of his brothers, flourishing and striving ever upwards, sinking his roots into the hearts and brains of the exploited masses.

God's principle was the bonfire lit by Savonarola, the condemnation of vanity, the frigid virtue of Robespierre. God speaks through Elisha when he orders that Jezebel be thrown to the dogs and the vile splendor of the unfaithful Phoenicians burned by fire. God too spoke through Judge Dumas when, having heard the list of scientific contributions by Lavoisier, he answered, "We have no need of savants, but of good citizens." Under God's protection stand the weak, drawing on a super-earthly principle of justice to oppose the "worldly" principle of aristocratic progress. In practice, that "super-earthly principle" meant equality of men in poverty, dullness of mind and sentiment, a reign of wretched, self-satisfied petty bourgeois who renounced knowledge, beauty, and creativity in the name of an animal comfort, in the name of paradise with its tree of life and its interdiction on thinking. What else could Adonai[1] yearn for? The slavish spirit, the thirst for peace, the lowering of man, the acceptance of his perpetual dependence on God—that is, nature—smoldered in these outwardly revolutionary, democratic, and popular programs championing "righteousness."

Consciousness of the greatness of human nature and the perpetual longing for might, knowledge, and beauty belonged to the noblest epochs of the aristocratic order. The master was more truly a man. And when those who once hearkened to the God of the poor became proud lords, gleaming in purple and gold, the thought of the poorer classes was driven to strange heresies that suspected Satan had triumphed in the world, counterfeiting God's place. The deity who made this harsh world in which no justice dwells—He is not the true god at all, but the Demiurge, who is the Devil, the rebellious Prince of this world. "And God? Why does He tolerate it all? Why does He not deliver help? Possibly He's captive, beaten by evil? Perhaps the one they call 'Satan,' languishing in Hell, is in fact the Great, the Maligned One? Perhaps it is He, the vanquished God of justice, temporarily cast off?"

Strong indeed was the belief in a divine righteousness, and the cursed abomination of "pride" in the wealthy, wise, and noble. Justice acquired a reactionary stamp; progress an exploitative stamp.

In the controversies of the Sismondians and the Ricardians, the same dispute was re-cast in new forms. "Progress in wealth, even at the cost of the worker's suffering," said the Ricardians coolly. "Justice, even if it means a universal poverty," retorted the Sismondians.

Into this dispute stepped the greatest of the prophets—Karl Marx. He sided with Satan. He rejected justice, allowing it neither as an ideal without wealth nor as any feasible program. He

recognized the development of humanity's economic powers as paramount, justifying everything, the only way. But he demonstrated that this path leads precisely to the triumph of justice, to the triumph of man's spirit in both its pillars: the thirst for might and the thirst for justice. The proletariat did not repudiate progress after the manner of earlier democracies; it esteemed technology and science and true art. Instead, it is now the ruling classes who attempt to proclaim the bankruptcy of science and sink noticeably into superstition and mysticism. Their "progress" is turning against them; it is the proletariat that now speaks of power, life's joy, the grandeur of science. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie mumbles of "law," of heavenly reward, and the vanity of the earthly realm. And not only for the old reason of deceiving the masses, but in genuine dread as they foresee the final hour, as the tight reins of the storming forces of progress slip from their grasp. Satan now leads the democratic columns. New poets—Byron, Shelley, Carducci—already attest to that. Might the last refuge of the money-aristocracy before the hurricane of revolution be an appeal to right, to justice, to proclaiming divine providence as opposed to vain craving for pleasures? Will Adonai ultimately settle in the camp of the social elite? They have worked so hard for that—are they not "democrats," Christians, benefactors, moralists? So collapses the psychology of the masters.

The best of that psychology is now inherited by the proletarian: belief in self and in life, the longing for progress, awareness of the dignity of human nature, the bold upward glance that sees the emptiness of that mythological populace of heaven.

Adonai and Satan, with their endlessly shifting masks, start to merge at last, revealed as two cripples or two wings of a once-unshod genius of humanity. Now he gains both wings—the genius of humanity spreads them across the heavens, wing of justice's thirst and wing of might's thirst.

Wealth is recognized as a means of perpetual development for the species. The appetite for wealth, even in its basest forms, acts as a driving force for progress in the twilight of man's unconsciousness. Justice is recognized as the loftiest mode of organizing labor—regrettably attainable only after humanity's half-conscious, toilsome expansion of its economic powers. Progress and justice stand reconciled. The last prophet from the bosom of Israel, for all his hostility to the money-grabbers, historically acquitted them, for he valued that tower of Babel called "culture," which his distant predecessors scorned. The building was a nightmare of torment; stones stained with some people's blood, overshadowed by others' baseness and cruelty. It remains difficult to this day. But outside that construction there is no other road. The route to equality and brotherhood leads through exploitation and conflict, the route to freedom through slavery. Let us accept this bravely and not with any silly, needless jeremiads. After all, no rational and righteous engineer laid out that road. It is the road of a weak animal battling a soulless universe. Man has made his way as he could—tripping, falling, gashing himself on sharp rocks, rolling headlong at times into an abyss, yet picking himself up to begin his Sisyphean task anew. More boulders, chasms, and torrents lie before him. But a shining peak is visible already. Yes, the route is meandering; so many needless agonies! But there was darkness without and within, and he groped blindly at first, not even conscious of the goal, and then with only a murky grasp of it. It's a dreadful tale on the whole, though with a good ending. If God were its author, we might forgive Him for its end's sake. But… it has no author—only blind necessity, which we

need not censure, and the life-instinct that guarantees its happy conclusion. A new philosophy of history is inseparably bound to its first religious manifestation.

Footnotes

1. *Adonai* in the last line: “In the end, the principle of self-abasement before the non-human is Adonai.” ↩

---

1. В конце концов принцип самопринижения перед нечеловеческим и есть Адонаи. ↩

2.

3.

Anthropomorphism and Harmony

Is Mythology – that wondrous tangle of graceful fairy tales – a religion? The freedom with which poets forged myths, the strange character (now piquant, now comical, sometimes scandalous) of certain myths, would argue against mythic lore being an object of religious reverence. Nonetheless, it does possess a religious dimension, but in an extraordinarily peculiar form.

How did the fundamental body of myths, common to all Indo-Europeans and so enriched by the Greeks, come about?

The Aryan [Indo-European] mind undoubtedly had a profound interest in natural phenomena. Sky, earth, water, sun, clouds intrigued him greatly. Being alive and impressionable, he liked to retell what he saw on earth and in the heavens. His language embraced that content and aided the narrator in such a way that, instead of mere retelling, a kind of creation arose. The Aryan language was built wholly on analogies with human labor: every sentence has an acting subject and an action. He could not say, “the sun *has* light emission” as a property; the language speaks rather: “the sun shines.” Immediately the imagination pictures a sun that acts, works, wants to shine. The same holds everywhere. Every phenomenon of nature turns into the action and mutual interaction of living entities.

Moreover, the language possessed another trait: having sprung from social interactions among men, it had created nouns with gender. A grammatical assignment of masculine or feminine often purely by chance, to this or that cosmic entity, thus endowed the latter with a significant human trait—*sex*. In the highest degree, this feature of language facilitated the rise of cosmic animism. The gods quickly took on the aspect of anthropomorphic beings, replete with sex, performing sets of actions against each other, entering into various mutual relationships. The vagaries of language were transferred, as if real conceptions, onto cosmic objects. Some elementary observations lay behind it; the rest was poetic invention, spurred, so to speak, by the creative force of speech. And for a long time still, among the Greeks, such creation continued, often based on casual resemblances of sound as well. Merging realms, combining akin deities that bore different names, piling up contradictory legends of diverse tribes, and endeavors to reconcile them—all this nourished imaginative fancy and turned the primal cosmic animism of the ancestors into a profusely branching romance, a wild wood of images.

But throughout all this poetic chaos, one process steadily advanced: the constant *individualization* of the gods. Among the Indians (i.e., early Indo-Aryans), gods still readily merged and split, and one divinity might prove threefold, or sevenfold, etc., in persons. Likewise among the Romans, for a long time, their gods, though possessed of will and capability of action, still largely fused with actual phenomena of nature. But the Greeks took anthropomorphizing the cosmos farthest. Language and myth conferred upon gods so many human traits irreconcilable with the sun, or the sea, or the mountain as such that the actual entity and its verbal-poetic reflection fell apart. Where the Semites developed a notion of an indefinitely spiritual principle, dwelling in nature's phenomena and in the domain of cosmic forces—*Elohim*—the Greeks instead evolved the notion of an immortal, mighty, humanlike ruler superintending each class of phenomena.

Hence cosmic animism metamorphosed into anthropomorphic polytheism. Whenever the imagination collided with two gods of the same "order" and one prevailed, the other—along with its entire body of myths—would assume a subordinate role or be demoted to some great mortal hero, and its myths would correspondingly acquire a more realistic stamp. Renan comments on this:

> "Greek mythology, from one end to the other, is the product of continuous misunderstanding, by which gods—born of primeval man's awe before nature—turned into concrete personalities. Yet that unbroken misunderstanding bore enormous religious import. It led to acknowledgment of a deep kinship between gods and men."

Thus from one root come gods and mortal men. Or as a later pagan theologian put it, "God is an immortal man, and man is a mortal god."

Therein lies the colossal debt we owe Greek mythology with regard to Man: in place of animals or monstrous forms, the gods acquired the pure form of man. "To the ancient riddle of the Sphinx—'What is divinity?'—the Hellenic Oedipus replied: 'Man,'" says Hegel. And indeed this is so, though, regrettably, it demands large and significant caveats.

The Greek yet adored *not man but nature*. But he adored it not in fear, as a barbarian would, but for its grace. Contributing to that was Greece's splendid climate, and the relative prosperity and partial mastery over nature which Hellenic civilization had achieved.

"Nature is beautiful." This was the Greek's first article of faith. Though, indeed, it could be none too benevolent and even cruel, it was still beautiful. But what is the beauty of nature? Perhaps nowhere is its essentially human character as evident as in ancient myth. For the Greek explained nature's beauty by rendering it into human terms.

> "Faced with the sea," Renan writes, "with its glittering or dark hues, the indefinite blend of sadness, immensity, terror, and living charm welling up in the Greek's soul opened up for him a whole cycle of melancholic, capricious, elusive oceanic gods. Different impressions, different gods for mountains, for earth, for fire, for volcanoes, for the atmosphere with its varied phenomena."

So nature stirs purely human emotions in man: does the sea itself feel sadness, anger, kindness? Of course not. But by interpreting its movements through analogies with human gestures and utterances, man bestows upon it his own consciousness and emotions. It *seems* to him that he has penetrated the sea's soul, though in reality he's endowed the sea with the riches of *his* own soul. We moderns stop at that. Saying "sunset is solemn and sad," we commit ourselves fully to it. We forget, as the Greek never knew, that the sunset neither sorrows nor exults; that the phenomenon in itself stands far apart from the sight we observe—only the rotation of the earth, our vantage shifting at a certain angle to the sun's rays. We forget, as the Greek never knew, that all the poetry of a sunset is an unconscious creation of our own nerve–brain system. But in compensation, the Greek perceived his own reflection in the phenomenon more clearly than we do. From the red conflagration, he beheld, as it were, the suffering face of a being immolating itself, solemnly ascending its funeral pyre. Rejoicing, the Greek would hail its resurrection, when, with the sun's joyful morning rays, that same figure smiles upon him with the smile of newly discovered youth and reborn happiness.

All the sensuous beauty of nature man creates via his sympathy. If nature lives, plays, or suffers, it's only because man already has grown rich enough in soul to lavish on it the diamonds of his own heart.

So in worshiping nature, the Greek humanized it—indeed, for its humanity he deified it. Thus *by that token* he also deified humanity. But how so? Nature helped him conceive the human in its ideal development. A humanlike being whose anger shows itself in a sea storm or a thunderclap from the sky is, of course, infinitely mightier than the mortal of Earth: what enormous grandeur in that powerful life—yet still human. The poet Homer, in describing how "Zeus in a sign nodded with his black eyebrows; suddenly fragrant locks rose upon the Cronion's immortal head, and Olympus quaked beneath his nod," depicts a being of vast majesty and strictly personal, very human mien.

Similarly, the loveliness in the gods behind the dawn, springtime, cosmic love, or wisdom—these must surpass earthly man's loveliness, wisdom, because nature's immensity, in which dwell those deities, is so grand. The cosmic grandeur that yields man's anthropomorphic impressions

helped create in him the image of humanity in the highest potential, to create an ideal of humanity and a cheerful morality that says: “Imitate God”—which for a Greek meant “grow and develop.”

But nature’s beauty carries another side. For man to perceive, especially to perceive easily, a vast variety—and nature is extremely diverse—there must be a unifying principle in that variety. Only *order* is experienced as beauty.

The Greek deified the raw powers of nature’s parts and the radiance and purity of their manifestations, for he empathetically identified with the joy of living in elemental strength. But he also deified *order* in nature, having already in ancient times named it “cosmos” and likened it early on to a musical concord or harmony. He discovered an order there (to a great extent introduced by himself in his desire to comprehend and aesthetically embrace his surroundings, for the Greek cosmos was quite unlike what we now see as the scientific universe—it was a more artistic simplification of reality), and by that discovery he exalted it, for it allowed him to delight in the wondrous variety. He exalted it too because the notion of order evoked in him a vision of magnificent repose, an untroubled, painless existence among the gods. Disorder was self-evidently strife, anguish, exertion, and imperfection. Order was calm, bliss, and consummation. As the concept of the cosmos grew, the passionate, vigorously beautiful gods of Homer receded further into the background, while the gods’ aspect of repose was more and more divinized. The Olympians became unruffled, grandly rational, potent, yet with no more tasks to solve, fixed in a recognized perfection. The storms of the world, the sufferings of living organisms, remained at the foot of Olympus—products of matter’s imperfections, presumably alien to the godly principle, that principle of chaos not fully vanquished but rather restrained by the forces of order.

“Imitate God” then came to mean, “Rise above your passions; prize, above all else, order; yield your weak, all-too-human heart to the age-old laws.” The religion of harmony, an aristocratic religion of conservative design and lofty, freely accepted hierarchy, triumphed with Apollo, a foreign god but now transformed, beloved by the aristocratically conservative Dorians.

Thus from a romantic cosmism of storms, the impetus of immeasurably passionate, valiant, humanlike cosmic powers—the gods—Hellas advanced to a classical cosmism of gods who keep the laws of order, guardians of peace. The free evolution of man-as-rebel was confined in the beautiful, cool, marble chains of the stable ideal. But that was not the end: man was declared dependent, and moderation—meaning submission—became man’s highest good. (Plato, in the dialogue *Philebus* [the text has “Phaleb” but likely means “Philebus”], says the chief condition for the highest happiness lies in retaining measure and proportion, which makes man self-sufficient.) The Greek, even in making humanity “divine,” did not conceive it as free: even the gods were subjected to a faceless fate, occasionally identified with chance. Plato, whose genius partly surpassed the bounds of authentic Greek worldview, on the other hand still hews close to it, and his mythical illustrations in the dialogues are often revealing. In the famous myth of souls striving to behold ideas in their eternal, pure beauty, in *Phaedrus,* it is said the souls’ original movement goes from perfection to imperfection. But why? Why do the good, wise, mighty Ideas fail to avert that sad order, to block the descent? They *cannot*. It is nature’s law, a

necessity (*thesmos nomos Adrasteias*), eventually an all-powerful "chance" (*syntýcha tinz*). Thus, even with Plato, whose gods attained the loftiest spirituality, they stand infinitely apart from the all-bounding *Yagu,* the God-will that knows no bounds. And if such a god enslaves, it simultaneously ensures the unbridled freedom-loving of its creators, guaranteeing an unbounded thirst for might. Meanwhile, the Greek instinct, subjecting even the gods to fateful destiny and confining them with law, reveals a contemplative, conciliatory spirit.

This is felt too in another line of thought that might have led to a pure religion of humanity, yet fell frozen on its threshold.

The Myth of the Superman

Many nations that devotedly worshipped the elements, or their creator, still harbored a sense of wonder before humanity itself. In its maturity, mankind would give voice to this self-wonder through none other than Sophocles—the same Sophocles who was the prophet of order as the guarantee of the gods' peace:

> In the world are many mighty powers,
> Yet naught is mightier than man.

A recognition of man's vast role in the cosmos was one of the impulses behind the creation of a myth in which man would someday render crucial assistance to the gods in their struggle with the forces of darkness.

It is curious how differently that bright myth found expression in the psyches of various peoples. We see it in its purest form among the Persians. There, the gods are starkly split into good and evil, and Man—Saošyant, supported by the good divinities—will save the world. Among the Indians, man surpasses the gods even more starkly and definitively: to the savior Buddha-Gautama, the gods humbly bow. He triumphs over the devil. But how? Not by granting victory to life; instead, by eradicating life at its very root. This is pessimism that man has endorsed—and thus it is converted into a kind of decadent optimism. Among the Germanic peoples, we find their interpretation of the myth suffused with a grim and troubled pessimism. Left to the foggy, bitter North, the Scandinavians put no faith in the gods of light winning out. Why did man not come to their aid and secure victory? A hazy feeling that he had gone astray and degenerated found expression in the myth of Siegfried's betrayal of his true calling—beauty, wisdom, triumph—Brünnhilde. The world's savior perished. He saved no one. Gloom prevails.

The Greeks preserve only vestiges and recollections of the myth, but they are highly intriguing. They maintain that the gods have already fought against darkness (the Titans) and won with man's help—Prometheus. But they stop short. Dimly sensing that injustice and fate still rule the world, they turn Zeus himself into a tyrant, proclaim Prometheus's rebellion against him; out of the savior of the gods they fashion their foe. Once more, there is the promise of a man-savior, yet now a different one who will come and defeat the gods, not to save them but to deliver mankind from them. Then they shrink back from their own boldness, dreaming up an outcome. The would-be vanquisher of the gods was a son of Zeus and Thetis. Zeus, upon discovering the threat looming for him, marries Thetis off to a mortal, from whom is born the "lesser breed" Achilles. Of course, he is stronger and more beautiful than all men, but how can a short-lived hero dare the throne of the gods? Prometheus begs forgiveness. Achilles, after his brief splendid moment, descends to Hades, languishing there amid the gloom of Death's realm. The campaign against the gods is renounced. Yet the banner of rebellion had been raised.

So the willing submission of man under law triumphs. It is the religion of an aristocracy and of a settled, codified society. Democracy, evidently, could not set forth a fresh, vigorous religion of its own. Nevertheless, within the limits we have noted, the Hellenes shaped the highest type of man (the classical), harmonious and lovely, though overly reconciled and "sufficient unto himself." The history of Greek religiosity—up to the apogee of the aristocratic-leaning ideal in Apollo and Diana—shows us the story of man's growth.

Apollo was initially a foreign god, but his distinctive aspects—as a martial deity, a deity of oracles, a deity of light—provided ample fodder for purely Hellenic creativity. In the sixth century [BCE], the Delphic Greek corporation—the guardian of Apollo, allied with Sparta, which discovered its own ideal in him—prevailed in the religious sphere. The gods completely shed their elemental aspect and became ideal deities, the gods of a mature Hellenism.[1]

"What is Apollo, if not the embodiment of Dorian genius?" remarks Renan. "In his cult there is nothing mystical, no orgiastic element, no trace of the wild zeal that characterized the Phrygian rites (Dionysus). An enemy of the Pelasgian agricultural and craft gods (perhaps we should say: *democratic* gods? – A.L.), this ideal Dorian archetype sets for itself only these tasks: vengeance, protection, punishment—no other tasks befit its dignity. And what is his sister, Artemis, except the feminine manifestation of the same genius? She is a Dorian girl who has become man's equal through a masculine upbringing—pure, proud, mistress of herself, not craving any patron or lord." "Physical phenomena," Renan continues, "remain only the backdrop: humanity has definitively carried the day."

For an aristocrat, of course, it was comparatively easier to reach the religion of self-sufficient, harmonious Man. In flourishing eras he felt himself the rightful helmsman of his city, and found in the city's life a force that more or less distracted him from ruminations on death. But these reflections must have eroded his strength in proportion to the demise of hopes for a social *kosmos*. Then the question of personal-soul immortality comes to the fore.

If the slaves had no voice in their religion, it seems plausible that the middle classes—yeoman farmers and free citizens of "democratic states" like Athens—would veer from Apollo toward another system of worship borrowed from foreigners. "The Olympian gods," says Renan,[2] "were

suited only to the aristocrat. No furrow of care crossed their brows, nor a gleam of sorrow; it was human nature viewed schematically on its noble side, disregarding suffering. Yet the afflicted want their god to suffer with them."

The arrival of a deity for a sorrowful life, the god of frenzied dithyramb—strange Bacchus-Dionysus—threw Greek cultural circles into perplexity. But it so strongly captivated hearts that they had to come to terms with it. Even so, Rome at one point quelled the Bacchanalia with savage mass executions of the "conspirators."

The religion of Dionysus abounded in "mysteries." One was promised a union—if only briefly, in the ecstasy of ritual—with the immortal cosmic energies bounding unbridled through nature. Talk of redemptive suffering, of another world, arose. In the vine's hidden blossoming they saw a sign of immortality. The old wineskins of Olympian culture could scarcely contain the fermenting new "spiritual wine." Despair intermingled with a dim delight, death contended with life. In time, these principles annihilated Olympus, undoing also the first bearers of them: both Apollo and Dionysus would eventually be labeled devils.

Footnotes

1. For the Romans this feature appeared even more unmistakably. In *De Legibus* ["On the Laws"], Cicero writes: "We should revere as gods those virtues such as Prudence, Valor, Piety, Fidelity, building temples for them, but by no means for vices." ↩

2. All quotations from Renan here come from his essay *De l'Antiquité*. ↩

Break in harmony

In the very earliest period, the Greeks—who loved life so much—faced death with a natural fear, though it did not in the least paralyze their martial courage. Homer has preserved numerous testimonies about the primordial Underworld (Hades) of the Hellenes. It strongly resembles the Hebrews' Sheol: a cheerless, dreary place with no real life, only a vague, nightmare-like persistence of souls.

Achilles insists it would be better to be a hired hand under the sun than to reign in Hades. The souls there are portrayed as something very pitiful: hosts of wraiths, who must be provided a bit of food so that they won't harm mortals. Homer paints them in such miserable hues:

> Meanwhile Hermes, the Kyllenian god,
> Summoned forth from their senseless corpses the souls
> Of the men slain; in his hands he held
> The golden wand that as he chooses
> Lulls men's shining eyes to slumber

Or awakens those in sleep.
He waved it, and as a crowd they followed Hermes,
Issuing tiny shrieks—like bats that squeak
Within the shadowy depths of a cave
When one clinging to the rocky walls
Falls off and flutters, and the rest in confusion
Go squeaking about.
So the shades, now squeaking, all flew off,
Led by Hermes, helper in adversity,
On toward the bounds of darkness and decay.

But now the light of day begins to penetrate that murky kingdom. First of all, the thoughts of priests and lawgivers moved in this direction: making the secrets of afterlife into a source of force for laws and morality, extending the gods' might—these guardians of the state's, society's, and the family's foundations—into the afterlife was their aim. Thus developed the doctrine of "rewards and punishments." Plato, who repeatedly addresses this belief, everywhere calls it an "ancient myth."

A second influence that spurred a kind of "reform" in the concept of afterlife was the thirst for immortality, arising primarily among those people and classes deprived in this life; the greater their adversity, the stronger their longing for the beyond, and the more it won over even the aristocracy—especially once society's underpinnings grew unsteady and life offered less satisfaction in a political sense.

A third impetus came from the strengthening notion of the soul as the master and manager of the body, a purely spiritual principle—rational, elevated, harmonious—versus the lower, inert, indeed from the outset corrupt body. This notion was developed enthusiastically by the aristocracy, given its aristocratic implications. Plato likens the higher soul—i.e. the true soul in man—to the "philosophers and rulers" of the state, whereas the body, prone to rebellion and worthless for initiative, yet capable of lowly resistance, is the *demos*.

All these forces led to the eventual revival—on a vast scale—of the once-suppressed cult of chthonic deities (the gods of earth) beneath the Olympian ascendancy.

Dea Mater—the earth's fruitfulness—Persephone (Kore), Hades, Hermes, gods of the underground, plus Kore, Triptolemus, Dionysus—gods of the sprouting of plants—long since had woven the inseparable bond between the agricultural religion and the religion of death.

The earth grants life, and to the earth returns our remains. The earth is our mother and our tomb. But the seed buried in the earth, sown there, rises again under the sun to a new and greater life.

Hence Demeter, who bestowed on humanity the boons of agrarian culture—the kind goddess to whom man owes all civilization, our veritable mother and nourisher—revealed at the same time the grand secret that death is merely a temporary state, a transition into another life. It stands to reason that this other life might be good or ill, contingent on whether we honored the gods'

commandments in life. Those are the rudiments of a truly serious cultural religion. Even Apollo (i.e., Delphi) did not dare to reject it. The highest minds acknowledged its power. Sophocles exclaims: *"Thrice blessed is he who goes to Hades, having beheld the sacred rite. Such a one truly lives in this darkness; the rest are fated only to suffer."*

Clearly, the "sacred rite" is the Eleusinian Mysteries, firmly held by all of Orphism—that is, the entire movement that strove to shift religion's center of gravity to the hopes of an afterlife, simultaneously employing it to moralize earthly life.

So what were these Mysteries? They were the "revelation" of Demeter's cult in its depths, realized by means of a peculiar symbolic drama in which a large crowd of initiates participated.

Many researchers surmise we are dealing here with an *actual* mystical secret. They compare the Hellenic group of Orphics with the Freemasons. They claim that this secret was guarded so devoutly that only Christian writers dared expose it—inevitably distorting and vulgarizing it.

Apparently, though, the matter was not so arcane nor so solemn. We can be certain of only one thing: it was a highly poetic cult, featuring shifts from frenzied grief to wild joy, purifications, vigils, fasts, outbursts of delight, nighttime torch-running amid the gloom, dread, then suddenly bright light. The outline of a temple was revealed; the participants at last were led into a place of rapture; voices were heard. Stage contraptions produced symbolic marvels; declamation, dance, and music had their place. They venerated the statue of a *Mater Dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows).

Renan continues:

> "Undoubtedly, the Eleusinian Mysteries had a weighty moral and religious impact. They brought consolation in this present life, promised a future life, guaranteed reward not only for piety and purity, but for justice."

If solace in this world, the promise of another life, the preaching of reward, and the cult of a mother lamenting her child's death were all present in the Eleusinian Mysteries, then no less impressive are the features we see in the cult of Adonis.

Renan says: *"Adonis is the sun, traveling six months through the zodiac's upper signs and six months through the lower; the boar that kills him symbolizes winter. Equally, Adonis can represent vegetation, with its cycles of withering and revival. But what caused women to flock en masse to Adonis's feast day? The desire to mourn the young god, taken by death far too soon, to behold him on his bier, laid in flowers, the lovely head drooping helplessly, to caress him with their hands, cut their hair for grief, wail out loud, and then rejoice in his resurrection."*

Renan rightly underscores the sensual side of this rite, yet leaves unmentioned its link with the mystical significance: At the bier of Adonis, man laments his own mortality and rejoices in the illusion of his immortality.

> "Thorough scholarship," Renan goes on, "shows that everything in Christianity which is not *Evangelical* was taken from the pagan mysteries."[1]

Renan here stops halfway. Indeed, a good deal of the Gospel and Pauline tradition is taken from the mysteries; is it possible that the early death of Adonis, his descent into Hades, and his rising again bear no connection at all with the Gospels? On Christmas and at Easter, by ancient custom, devout Christians attend the commemoration of the birth, death, and resurrection of "Adonis," themselves unaware how closely they match their ancient sisters. We ought also add that Adonis's "brother," the solar god Mithra, not only dies and revives, but also acts as a redeemer of humanity. The parallels between Christianity and the Mithraic mysteries were so striking that the Church Fathers could explain them only as "the devil's crafty prefiguring of Christianity."

We will note another purely Orphic myth, which simultaneously reveals one of Orphism's pinnacles *and* a remarkable further resemblance to Christianity: the myth of Zagreus.

The Orphics vigorously campaigned against blood sacrifices. By all appearances, they still contended as well with human sacrifice. The myth of Zagreus was first and foremost a "ritual myth," functioning symbolically to ingrain in minds the idea of abandoning human sacrifice. Yet people were unwilling to relinquish blood sacrifice entirely—for in sacrificing, they shared a meal with the gods and partook of their life and greatness. Cannibalism possessed elements of mysticism: not only was it considered normal food for the gods—especially if one sacrificed something dear and tender, say one's firstborn—but a man devouring the heart, the brain, etc. of another was believed to absorb that person's virtues. Hence that cannibal impulse to devour, side by side with the gods, someone valiant and splendid from among one's enemies. Hence the boast: "My god has devoured your god, just as I, son of my god, devoured you, son of your god!" If my gods have eaten another god, they have appropriated his greatness. By feasting jointly with the gods, man gives them his food; they bestow upon him theirs—and if all goes well, man might become godlike, a "god-eater." That was a great joy for him—he would partake of the devoured god's might.

And so the Corybants, these semi-god, semi-human, semi-bestial creatures, seized the young, exquisite child and darling of the god (Zeus)—namely Zagreus—and devoured him. But Athena, goddess of wisdom, morality, and the new culture, was aghast as she beheld from lofty, many-peaked Olympus the Corybants' feast. She turned Zeus's gaze that way. At once, with a bolt of annihilating lightning, Zeus punished the Corybants. All that remained of sweet Zagreus was only his heart. Zeus took that heart, still pulsating, warmed it in his bosom, and from it emerged a new, radiant young deity—the heart of the cosmos—Dionysus. From the corpses of the Corybants came our material world. For, as the philosophic reading of that ritual myth (originally akin to the myth of Isaac's sacrifice) puts it: The Corybants are the dark forces that swallowed the bright and lovely emanation of divinity, Zagreus. We, that is, our corporeal existence, descend from the accursed "god-eaters," the Corybants. Hence we are cursed too; but as "god-eaters," we harbor within ourselves fragments of the body and blood of the god—little sparks of spirit. These yearn longingly to return to their luminous heart, to Dionysus. That is why, in our darkest times, we so love Dionysus and thirst for him. He, a suffering deity, one with

a wounded and flaming heart in his breast, who rose from his torment to the god-father—he too loves us, mortals, for he feels his kinship with us. Gently he smiles on our souls, stands up for us when, under the influence of our criminal body, the soul grows dark and sins. One day he shall gather all to himself, this god of our blood, and the ancestors' crime—their god-killing—will prove the world's redemption and real communion with spirit. Maybe that is how matter itself shall be sanctified. Possibly the entire cosmos will ascend, and we shall see even the body's resurrection once it has become ennobled by suffering.

Thus likewise St. Paul hesitates between flat condemnation of the flesh and a dream of its glorification. On the one hand, it is terrible and we must wrest the soul from its prison; on the other, it is a pity to leave it behind entirely.

In any case, the parallels scarcely need emphasis.

As with every dying-and-rising deity, Zagreus is clearly linked to the sun, consumed nightly on an evening funeral pyre and swallowed by the sea's waves, only to reappear in heaven. Recall that marvelous hymn of Hauptmann's Heinrich: "Oh sun, ancient progenitor." Like a wayward child, man must turn back to it. There, Meister Heinrich did not realize how correct his comparisons are between the sun-religion and worship of the Resurrected.

But the fascinating theme of "Christ as the final solar god" we cannot fully develop here. I hope to devote a special essay to it.

Orphism is the rupture of harmony. Perhaps it arose more or less from democratic origins, as is shown by its offspring—Christianity. Possibly it was, at first, the religion of peasants, of poor farmers. But the aristocracy also moved to meet it and, relying on Orphism, built a lofty, distinctive religious philosophy.

Footnotes

1. "Everything in Christianity that is not evangelical was borrowed from pagan mysteries," from Renan's *De l'Antiquité*. ↩

Religious philosophy of the Hellenes

At the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th century BCE, the religious life of Hellas experienced an era aptly dubbed by some historians of philosophy the "theological period." Chenier, author of a major study on Pythagoras, characterizes that epoch thus:

> "The mythological era had ended, and the theological era began. It is marked by the following tendencies: on the one hand, the increasing sway of speculative and rationalistic thought; on the other hand, a keen interest in religious questions and an almost mystical bent of mind, eager to believe anything—particularly the unbelievable."

Society strove to formulate a refined religion that would buttress its stability—a foundation upon which one could erect the edifice of morality and politics. Orphism scored its victories; Delphi strengthened its position: a whole wave of thaumaturges sprang up, passing themselves off as prophets, even as gods (Epimenides, Pherecydes, Empedocles, etc.). Foremost among these prophets of the aristocracy, eager to defend itself against the onrushing tide of democracy, stands Pythagoras. Naturally, in the following lines we can merely highlight a few aspects of his vast and many-sided teachings. The aristocratic idealism of Pythagoras and Plato, that most remarkable phenomenon in religious history, is something we hope to treat separately in a dedicated essay.

System of absolute order

The central idea of Pythagoras consists in recognizing the sublunar world—all of "the sky," the cosmos minus the earth—as an absolute order. This splendid, absolute order stands in contrast to the earth's disorder. Humanity's task is to discern the law of this higher order and bring earthly life closer to it, aligning people's individual and social existence with the cosmos's eternal laws, insofar as that may be possible for this lower zone of life which has fallen to our lot.

Being an aristocrat through and through, Pythagoras could not fail to perceive dualism in nature, for the social struggle between dreadful "anarchy" and splendid "order" struck his eyes all too vividly and pained his heart far too keenly. Just as society contains a tendency toward dissolution, chaos, and what one might call raw human material, so does nature contain it: that *to allo*, the ever-shifting, the *apeiron*—the infinite, i.e. the unfinished. By contrast, the principle of order is *peras*—the state of being finished—and its highest form is unity.

The One, the unit, is the heart of the cosmos, its center, filled with living fire, the most divine part of it; yet the One has overcome the entire world, enveloping it all. It is both its center and its outermost perimeter, the blazing wall of the universe. But the universe is not merely a uniform divine sphere, as the Eleatics later taught. Between the blazing wall and Hestia–hearth (the heart) lies a broad zone where the heavenly bodies revolve according to plan, resounding in a harmonious chorus. The earth is last among them. It also revolves around Hestia. Pythagoras rejected the idea that the earth was at the center: how could this much-sinning world occupy the

center? Indeed, we do not even see wondrous Hestia; as it turns, our earth remains turned away from it, so to speak, with its underside—where nothing lives. The sun acts as a mirror reflecting Hestia's rays, and we live by that reflection. Thus Pythagoras exalted the world, yet he never opposed a transcendent realm to the real one for even a moment.

How then did this intermediate zone arise, with its gradation from lower to higher? Thus: the One, the cosmic fire, breathes—it draws matter (that is, nothingness) into itself, from beyond its sphere. This nothingness, on entering the sphere, mingles with the One in various proportions. Some of these proportions are bright and beautiful; others, less so. The key to the proportion between the finite and the infinite—hence the essence of any given proportion (i.e. any thing)—is number. Odd numbers are closer to the One, as they are finished; even numbers lie farther off, more akin to the *apeiron*, the unfinished. The decad (10) is likewise a unity in another of its aspects: as 1 it begets all numbers; as 10 it encompasses them. Thus, the world's substance is numbers—that is, the law of proportion between the perfect One and nonexistence. Multiplicity is the offspring of numbers, the union of the One and nothingness. There is no evil in the universe. Beyond the cosmos lies nothingness; within the cosmos, all is enlivened by numbers, and every number is sacred, yet there is a gradation of perfection in the world. Earthly life is governed by the worst numbers—its proportion is the least advantageous: hence everything here decays, remains brief, and is beset by chaotic motion, instead of the lovely, exact geometry of the heavens. A human soul is a number, a harmonic proportion of the One and its parts. That within it akin to the One is immortal.

Such is the coherent doctrine of Pythagoras.

A striking feature is the effort, upon acknowledging dualism, to reconcile it in a single unity. The spirit enters matter, but its basis lies beyond matter; it does not in the least want to flee those firm bonds (as in Plato), nor does it regard its union with nonexistence as a "fall." Instead, it breathes and creates splendid proportions, a harmony, a cosmos. Likewise, on earth, an aristocrat has no cause to despair and pine for death or the afterlife, for some ideal beyond the stars; he should succeed in shaping society into a splendid proportion by governing it harmoniously. Then he will be a co-worker with the "god-unit," the "god-monad," cultivating his soul and naturally rising in the ladder of beings on the wings of his soul's self-conscious harmony, drawing closer to the heart of the god-world.

A second, highly characteristic hallmark of Pythagorean aristocratic idealism is its exaltation of finitude and self-containedness over anything infinite. Pythagoras was a complete stranger to an "aesthetics of growth" or an "aesthetics of the boundless": perfection is equal to itself and occupies a defined, bounded space. It is the apotheosis of limitation, wholly at odds with the modern mind's reverence for the beauty of the limitless. Pythagoras's idealism remains immanent, and that is good. It has not yet shattered the chains of limitation, which is bad. Plato would go further in both respects, unconsciously paving the road for Christianity, from which, very likely, he would in horror have recoiled.

A brief outline of Pythagoras's religious philosophy cannot convey the true magnitude of his religious attempt. One must behold this godlike man in his political practice.

Dicaearchus portrays Pythagoras's arrival in Croton as follows:

> "He was about forty, tall, graceful, his manner of speaking dignified; his form and face truly beautiful. At first people compared him, and later identified him, with Apollo Hyperboreus. He was ever weightily serious, never allowing himself any jest or smile.
>
> Eloquent, inspired, profoundly learned, he was brimming with the experience he had gathered on his travels and in talks with the greatest sages across the world."

Early in his career at Croton, Pythagoras strove to influence the masses widely—he astonished the crowds, and the effect of his addresses was magical. After his first sermon, he gained two thousand ardent devotees; the aristocratic council of a thousand, already embroiled with the people's demands, recognized in him a tremendous ally. At the authorities' invitation, Pythagoras made speeches to the youths, then to the women. Aristocratic youth and women generally became utterly devoted, admiring followers of the new teaching. The city's rulers offered Pythagoras the post of council president, which he declined, preferring to stay clear of power but above it.

His ideal was a moral state grounded on the blind obedience of the aristocracy—yet that same aristocracy had to be reeducated upon new principles. Aligning himself with the existing aristocracy, Pythagoras prepared the younger generation, organizing selected youths into a special educational and philosophical fraternity. Regrettably, we cannot delve here into the fraternity's rules. We can say only that it produced disciplined, stalwart characters. To forge total unity of spirit among the chosen, Pythagoras not only revived Dorian aristocratic *syssitia* (communal meals) but also recommended a unity of possessions—an aristocratic communism. Thus he created a formidable, half-secret force, akin to a spiritual order, to which, in his dreams, he assigned the task of leading all humankind.

Meanwhile, as a deft politician, Pythagoras assured the ruling class that the reforms he stealthily introduced were in fact ancient traditions.

The Pythagorean Democlid, rejecting the people's demands for certain reforms, called for living "by the fathers' laws."

To sway the crude minds of the ignorant majority, Pythagoras did not disdain cunningly staged wonders.

Branches were founded everywhere: not only Croton, but Tarentum, Heraclea, Metapontum, Sybaris, Acragas—these cities were more or less in the grip of an aristocratic sect, terrifying in its convictions and consistency.

Yet meanwhile the Hellenic world was splitting in two. The expulsion of the Peisistratids gave fresh impetus to the democratic movement. Pythagoreanism spread outward from Croton, democracy from Athens. The two waves collided. Which would prevail—Hellenic love of freedom or Hellenic love of order?

In opulent Sybaris, the democrats revolted. Taken by surprise, the Pythagoreans fled to their hub, Croton. Pythagoras knew the moment of decision had come. A huge army of enraged

Sybarites demanded the surrender of five hundred refugees. Croton was not ready for war. But Pythagoras staked everything. He brought all his influence to bear, all his otherworldly eloquence, and convinced the city to defy the Sybarite mob with a proud refusal. A small Crotoniate force, led by Pythagoras's son-in-law Milo—an ideal paragon of beauty and strength—completely routed the Sybarites. The victors entered the city and, to strike fear into every foe of the divine order, fanatically leveled the flourishing colony to the ground.

The Pythagoreans had reached the apex of their power. Now they no longer hid their designs, bringing the people of Croton itself firmly under heel. Their arrogant fanaticism became intolerable. A clever orator, Cylon—excluded from Pythagoras's order—took the lead of the democratic movement. Extremely instructive is the accusation he flung against the order at a vast assembly he convened: "They affectionately quote Homer's verses about the 'shepherd of the people,'" Cylon said. "To them, the people is a mindless flock; they alone are men—demi-gods!" He accused them of covert tyranny, of having ceased to convene the popular assembly. The people trembled with fury and refused to listen to excuses. All the pride of a free Hellene rose up against the notion of a command for absolute obedience to a higher breed of men. The storm was so violent that Pythagoras sought to calm it by condemning himself to exile. The order, with Milo at its head, deliberated at night, preparing a bloody crackdown. But Cylon understood his foes well. He moved first, assaulting Milo's house at the very hour when the forty top minds of the order were meeting there. The Pythagoreans fought like lions. They were locked inside and set ablaze. Then came the killings of the rest. For a decade, Croton was ruled by that "storm of violence" so loathed by Pythagoras—and which prevailed thanks to him.

He himself departed for Locri. The Locrians met him with honor and dread, declaring they had no use for new laws and begging him, this dangerous prophet, to leave their city.

The great elder went on to Metapontum.

There, he entered the Temple of the Muses and sat upon a tripod—tall, splendid, pensive, and silent. The Metapontines timidly gathered at the doorway, gazing on the motionless philosopher. When hunger and thirst wore him down, he leaned against a column. And he remained there, immersed in divine arithmetic and geometry, as long as his mind could function. Then death came. That grand attempt to extend Apollonian, Dorian-aristocratic principles—in a philosophically religious form—across all Hellas was foiled. The aristocracy began to grow despondent, to break the chains of cosmic harmony, to dream of another world.

As for immortality of the soul, Pythagoras understood it in a peculiar way: the soul is the body's proportion. After one body dies, it transitions to another; it can rise or fall. He acknowledges no pure soul nor pure matter. He accepts Orphism—fitting nicely into his philosophy—but only later Pythagoreans spoke of the salvation of the soul or body, sundering form and matter. For Pythagoras, number (the soul) is substance, matter is simply nothing, and man in his bodily aspect is the outward manifestation of number, turning nonexistence into existence. The proportion is imperfect, so the body changes, ages, falls apart, and the soul must then shape for itself a new, youthful body—improving or worsening its proportion, depending on what the preceding life was.

In the Golden Verses (a kind of Pythagorean code) we read:

"Purity of life prepares you to understand god and man,
You shall learn to appraise things aright.
You will see how often a man runs into danger,
How often he fails to notice the happiness laid near him by the gods,
Fails to discover a remedy for his sorrows—
For men are but toys of chance."

Such is the result of a bad proportion. Yet the divine number, the reflection of the One, still lives in us—and thus "trust in yourself, be courageous, for man belongs to the race of the gods." He has hope, he has a pathway to true freedom, i.e. a secure place in the divine order. Diogenes Laërtius reports that, according to Pythagoreans, a moral life frees the soul from the shackles of passion and grants freedom, meaning the triumph of its laws, its thought, and its movement.

Freedom is the triumph of the higher law; slavery, the "freedom" of human passions.
Freedom is the triumph of absolute aristocracy; slavery is the triumph of democracy.
Plato will say the same, yet declare the ideal unattainable and death the only deliverer.

The system of yearning for perfection

Hellas revered its prophets with no less veneration—and cloaked them in no fewer mystical mists—than did the Hebrews. The great philosopher and partial follower of Pythagoras, Empedocles, sang of Pythagoras: "He was a man of vast learning, with a broad and mighty mind. When he exerted all the powers of his spirit, his gaze penetrated far ahead; he saw countless things and the destiny of twenty generations." The scholar Porphyry says that Pythagoras was something midway between gods and men, or perhaps even an embodiment of Apollo Pythios or Apollo Hyperboreios.

The predisposition of the Greeks to hold their prophets in lofty esteem helped pave the way for proclaiming the final prophet from the banks of the Jordan—the Son of God.

No fewer legends gathered around Plato himself. Most of the ancients were convinced he was a god's son. One Christian writer even asserts that, according to the belief of the pagans, Plato was the son of a deity by a virgin. But the prophets—and Jesus himself—were spokesmen for an oppressed democracy, whereas the prophets of the Hellenes were champions of an aristocracy in decomposition under pressure from the popular masses.

Plato, to his dying day, delved ever deeper into Pythagoras's teaching. One might say he began as a Socratic and ended a Pythagorean. Still, the foundations of his own original doctrine stand out

even more plainly than do Pythagoras's. The driving forces of his brilliant thought were, on one hand, a biological instinct (one might call it "aesthetic") and, on the other, a social concern.

Biological Instinct in Thinking. By Plato's time, the laws of human thought had themselves become objects of observation by the human mind. The Sophists had begun the mind's self-critique. Logic, dialectic, and mathematics were beginning to take shape. One must keep in mind, however, that they did not simply arise empirically. The nervous–cerebral system is so arranged that it aims to work with minimal expenditure of energy. It possesses its own inherent law of functioning and tends toward orderly operation, just as does the heart, the stomach, and so on. Life sets this mental apparatus, which has its own internal law, certain tasks that often force it to work "incorrectly," i.e. at huge cost of exertion. When the mind—paying no attention to the raw facts and relying solely on what one might call the "already-thought-out" portion of them, i.e. on concepts—functions in line with its intrinsic law, it is at play and fashions systems that greatly gladden it and that it perceives as something comprehensible and consoling. But alas, those systems do not coincide with the chaos of facts. When the mind, dismissing its own rules, merely mirrors the facts like a lens—makes no effort to "think them through," i.e. impose its own order—then no system arises, and the mind dejectedly notes that the world is alien to it, capricious, accidental. Science occupies a middle ground. The thinking mechanism must become subtler and more flexible, encompassing the diversity of facts without losing itself in that diversity, establishing in them the unity which is its vital need—system, order.

Such is the grand biological mission of the brain. In lightening its work, a person's mind easily forges concepts like "self-identical" body, constant body, straight line, point, perfect circle, equal magnitudes, and so forth. All this proves the initial coarseness of perception, which failed to notice changes, irregularities, and inequalities where they actually existed but "didn't catch the eye." It also proves the rudimentary nature of reason, which could reflect the world only roughly, in simplified or "stylized" forms. But Plato thought otherwise. Following a strong biological (aesthetic) instinct—his sense of rapture when the mind had at its disposal simple, pure concepts, with the brain properly functioning—and a bitter feeling on noting the world's "erratic, murky, accidental" course, Plato declared the law of his imperfect life, of his imperfect mind, to be the law of being. He might have said, had he examined himself: "I want the laws of my thinking to become the laws of nature."

Because he could not achieve this, he saved his vital instinct by loudly proclaiming that this muddled nature is not the real one, that there is another, the true nature—the realm of Ideas—whose laws coincide with those of the mind, and that our world is but a distorted copy of it. In that regard, Plato was right: human reason must strive for a match between its own laws and the laws of being. He stood infinitely above those who simply declined that religious task of reconciling, in this sphere, the laws of life with the laws of nature. But the path of that reconciliation is extremely complicated. Science fulfills it, as if "legalizing" the facts, yet not trimming or cursing them whenever they don't fit into its Procrustean bed, but instead altering that bed while preserving its humanly rational character. An immense accumulation of experience shows that by proceeding thus, man can arrive at a firm consciousness of reality. Platonism, however, was an aberration of the vital instinct. Yearning for the beauty of thought, it

made its task easier by substituting the real world with a world of phantoms. The faults of its overly linear, compasslike reason it declared sacred, and laid blame on the facts.

All of metaphysics is that same type of aberration: it is correct in the depths of its instinct—"I want the laws of reason and the laws of the world to coincide, want the world to be transparent to reason, want it to be rational." But it is mistaken when, childishly insulting the world for being incomprehensible, it invents another, simpler, more convenient world, and in the haughtiness of a mad king declares by decree that this invented realm is the only higher reality.

We know that Greek philosophical thought before Plato advanced more rightly. The Ionian school naively believed in the identity of reason and being. The Ionians did not feel a rift; for them, the world was whole. Pythagoras never even conceived of building a different world and transferring his knowledge from the real sphere to one of (supposed being) the "ideal." For him, there is one universe, yet it contains noble regions (the luminaries) where the laws of mathematics (harmony) apply more readily, and ignoble regions where pure mathematics cannot function. Through the musical education of man, through bringing "music," i.e. rhythm, into society, Pythagoras hoped to assist in the "mathematization" of the "vale of sorrow." This is because Pythagoras was still making heroic efforts to subject social chaos (the *demos*) to order (the aristocracy). Plato, however, is thoroughly without hope on that front. In this world, he—ideologue of a class clearly being forced out—has no work to do. Why bother striving for an ideal? Let's instead turn our gaze to the further shore and inquire about our fate after death.

Biological Instinct in Sensation and Movement. In the *Laws,* Plato says that every animal can move, play, and grow, but man alone can bring rhythm and plastic elegance to his movements—dance. Every animal can cry out or make sound, but man can bring in rhythm and purity of tone—song. When he sings and dances, he rejoices. The essence is that not only the mind but the whole organism has its own laws, dictated by its structure; it lives by adapting to external influences without violating its inherent organization. A perfect organism, developed somewhere among the gods outside the pressure of living facts, would be shattered upon entering the life of our planet. An organism that adapts passively to the environment would cease being an organism at all. Thus Plato is correct when he says that a fine dance and a fine song are the real "walk" and "talk" for man. But from the fact that one cannot sing and dance at all times in daily life—transforming singing and dancing into a tribute to virtue, which in Plato's eyes is equated with the highest divinity—Plato deduces that man is astray in a world not his own.

Plato disdained labor, toil. To toil degrades and cripples man; it is unworthy of a free being. "I wish for the laws of rhythm and plastic form to dominate life." And that is correct. For us, it means making labor pleasant, creative, genuinely joyful, while unloading purely mechanical stupefying work onto the steel shoulders of machines. But that is an enormous program. This religious task (the reconciliation of nature's laws with the laws of life) is pursued nowadays by technology. Plato resolved it only partially, dividing people into classes and assigning the tasks of agriculture, labor, handicrafts to *metics* and slaves. He apparently failed to notice the monstrousness of that solution in the light of the ideal notion of human dignity. But even radical

aristocracy could not free the "master" from cares and troubles. No—the earth was not made for bliss.

The sense organs likewise have their own laws; they, too, enjoy themselves only when functioning properly, whence the appeal of lovely lines, colors, or tones (readily perceived elements). Furthermore, man perceives not solely with eye and ear but with his entire being, empathically "co-living" what he observes—hence the delight in animal beauty and strength, health, intelligence, grace, etc. But does the earth present us only with beautiful things to behold? Apart from the deformities, old age, disease found everywhere, along with variety and cacophony, is even the most beautiful sight on earth wholly satisfying? Human beauty merely rouses our notion of divine beauty. Earth holds no perfection, i.e. we carry within our organs and nerves an ideal, not attained yet by anyone, anywhere—an ideal of a luxuriantly flourishing, beautiful earth. "Is this not a recollection of something I once experienced that was superior?" wonders Plato. If so, then loving this wretched world is pointless; our concern must be solely that we might gain entry to a higher realm. And so Plato eagerly clutches at Orphic metaphysical religiosity, at the promise of an afterlife.

Where we envision a program for rebuilding the world, Plato sees only condemnation of reality and hope in an already-existing ideal somewhere else. Hence it was a "life-aberration." To proceed along the path of creation, of knowledge, of work, holding such a lofty ideal and so acutely sensing reality's shortcomings, one must have a deep faith in man's might, in labor's power, in progress. That faith the enfeebled aristocracy did not possess. One exit remained—the detached idealism which pronounces the dream to be the sole actual reality, and reality a mere mirage.

Social Concern. It would be incorrect to state that Plato, categorically and immediately, hopelessly waved off the real world. True, depicting his *Republic,* he explicitly said it is a polity located in heaven, which men should imitate to the best of their ability. Yet in the *Laws* he formulated a different though still quite aristocratic structure, which was, so they said, suited to the earth's imperfection, but not so far removed from the ideal. He even promised a third scheme, the final offspring of his opportunism. As a pure utopian, he dreamed of a philosopher-tyrant who would forcibly herd humanity into the ideal order. Although he hated tyranny (see, e.g., *Republic,* Book 9, which calls the tyrant "a consummate scoundrel"), he nonetheless made repeated trips to Sicily, to the elder and younger Dionysius, with lamentable outcomes. Once, Dionysius, in a rage, even sold Plato into slavery. Pythagoras's endeavors were grand and tragic; Plato's attempts appear almost comic. Such is always the course of history.

Plato's social ideal nearly coincides with Pythagoras's: the dominion of the wise, communism for the aristocracy, total immobility, and absolute submission. Small wonder that there are so many striking parallels—philosophically as well—between Pythagoreanism and China. To secure order at any cost, i.e. to end all development; "every change is bad in itself," our philosopher teaches. Fix inequality among people, assigning each his place. To that end, we must rely on the parables of the wise (the "pious lie" of purposely invented myths), plus the swords of warriors.

At this point, there is nothing in Plato's ideal that coincides with ours. We are people of progress and equality; Plato would have rejected our ideal. Progress and equality—these are human ideals. Plato was first an *eupatrid* [aristocrat] of Athens and only then a human being.

Still, at least something vital remains in his ideal: *sociality*, i.e. organization as opposed to anarchic individualism (though a distorted organization, since it rests on principles of inequality rather than brotherly sharing of labor); the crucial role of knowledge, second (though that knowledge is distorted, since it acknowledges only an a priori approach); a conquering impulse, third (though in a crudely primitive sense—colonial wars—rather than an enlightened thirst to subdue the elements); economic concern, fourth (though he deems it base). In later idealists, even these final elements or their shadows vanish.

The essence of Plato's religion is a longing for perfection. Perfection is the world of Ideas, beyond the body's reach but open to the soul—the aristocratic principle in us. Unlike in Pythagoras, the soul no longer aims to master the body but rather hastens to be rid of it. But Plato, as an aristocrat not yet fully decadent, preaches moderation, not the mortification of the flesh. Health, strength, beauty still seem for him steps upward. The decadent idealists, by contrast—be they democratic or infected with that same decadence—are quite another matter. Plato still remains a cosmist, albeit his cosmos is now fully humanized, an idealized reflection of reality exalted above it. He already triumphs idealistically over reality and proclaims the Ideal higher than reality itself, but that very Ideal for him is a reflection of a real cosmos, plus the notion of man as a massive part of the whole. Plato's God is still the world, but the world as demanded by Plato's aesthetic and social instincts. Plato awakened longing in hearts, he shattered the chains of the lovely cosmic nature—but only to shackle man in the imaginary chains of an ideal cosmos.

Israel's God is by no means the world but spirit, and chiefly *will*, the Will to might and justice. By this, the God of Israel is above Plato's God. Ancient cosmism declares: "I bow before the world and its laws." Plato says: "I do not accept the world, I construct a better one in my dream, and to that dream I bow, rejecting life for the dream, declaring that dream the only genuine reality." Israel says: "I do not accept the laws of the world—over the world must reign a mighty, living, humanlike Will that leads it to enlightenment and justice."

We note that Christianity will blend these latter two theses to the great detriment of each, then struggle to extricate itself from the ensuing contradictions.

Religion of labor says: "I accept the world as matter that must be reworked. I accept an ideal as the plan for re-creation. Will and justice—that is, the reign of organized humanity—will come, but they do not exist yet; they are only being born in travail."

Thus: is Platonism progress compared to cosmism? Both yes and no. It carries on, continuing further…

Individualistic idealism

Without dwelling on the pure but exceptionally barren-from-a-religious-standpoint monotheism of the progenitor of scholasticism (albeit an involuntary one), let us move on to the later forms of Hellenic religious philosophy.

It is nearing that fateful limit at which democratic Christianity must consume it. Clearly visible upon it are the marks of utter despair in the success of political life. The discord of Hellenic states, the formation of large monarchies, the loss of independence, and finally the centralization of empire—which stifles all initiative—destroyed the political side of man's soul. According to Aristotle, man is first and foremost a political, i.e. social, animal. Man was maimed: he was condemned to individualism.

But an individualistic resolution of the religious question is altogether impossible without a surge of mystical reverie. Epicureanism was a renunciation of religion in cultured forms suited to the mores and needs of well-off people. Cynicism was the same sort of renunciation in rougher forms adapted to the mores of the poor. Many Cynics, however, incorporated Orphic elements into their teachings and even dared to call themselves Pythagoreans, though there lay an entire abyss between those proud, highly cultured political aristocrats and these "barefoot monks," these "Capuchins" of the ancient world. Aristophon[1], in his comedy *The Pythagorean*, amusingly describes these stragglers from Pythagoreanism who are fleeing the world's evils:

> "In heaven's name, do you really think that those who call themselves Pythagoreans willingly starve and wear rags? Don't believe it. Necessity forces them: they have nothing, so they've invented rules of life suited exactly to any beggar. But just serve them some good fish and fine meat—then they'll tuck in with such relish they'll wind up biting their own fingers."

Here we see Orphism and Pythagoreanism utterly sunk into the social underclass. Christianity was bound to find its adherents there. The noblest and truly religious philosophical form was Stoicism. Stoics, far more than those "Pythagoreans" described above, could claim continuity with the great Samian. They improved his cosmology, and in following him, they tightly, powerfully bound it to theology: divinity is expressed in the world, nature is divine. For them, the cosmos is still the ultimate point of departure. But they no longer dream of ordering the social cosmos after the heavenly model: by means of proud, calm self-renunciation and endurance in suffering, they merely want to bring their own soul into harmony with divine nature. That once so bright and joyous rule—"imitate and obey nature"—acquired among the

Stoics a tragic cast: the cast of that wisdom tempered by suffering, that "defensive" wisdom which, up to our own day, goes by the name "stoic."

And yet here, the pride of ancient man in the face of suffering still shows itself. Bowing before nature, taking its blows upon his breast, the Stoic only aims to bear life's burden with dignity, so that afterward he may plunge into the waves of the world-soul and vanish within it. Such a religion was beyond the average person's strength. From there it is only a short way to Judaized Orphism or Orphized Judaism, which we call Christianity.

The philosophy of pure mysticism, Neopythagoreanism and Neoplatonism, ultimately declares the cosmos, visible nature, and our body to be products of decline, degeneracy, the humiliation of divinity. The closed, self-contained realm of nature is shattered—everything in it is, to some degree, a passionate striving or a loud plea for something lying beyond its bounds. Shattered too is the soul's self-sufficiency—now it is a poor captive dreaming of another world, another life.

All of that arose from the bitter conditions of life. The remaining vitality and realism hidden in Platonism was eradicated. Socialness takes on a transcendent aspect—unity in God. (Some strands of Christianity, compared to pagan mysticism, would restore to it a trace of earthly significance, but not in the sense of collaboration as in a religion of labor, nor of a structured civic order as with Plato, but only in the sense of a blissful symbiosis of the righteous.) Knowledge is replaced by mystical ardor, divine inspiration; we are already approaching the moment of proclaiming "foolishness in God" as something higher than the summits of philosophy. Even the shadow of a conquering instinct—if we do not count the fanaticism of later Christians—that had survived in Plato, as well as "economy" in the sense of concern for worldly well-being, is now declared unworthy even for the lowliest of men.

An obvious regression. Yet is it so in every respect? No—for the ideal of "the Kingdom of God on earth" is being readied, with its two postulates: the dominion of a shining human church over the elements (by the power of God the Logos), and the triumph of justice in the sense of brotherhood and equality within the church of the righteous. Despite its mystical hues, its ebbing human energy, and the tendency to theologize all of life, this ideal in its inner, human essence rose higher than the pure antique ideal, higher than Plato's ideal. It has more internally in common with the positive ideal of the reign of humanity. The romantic impetus of democratic ancient decadence is akin in spirit to the romantic yearning of modern man for beauty, power, perfection, and justice. Later thought need only return that ideal to the earth, give it a manly cast, and make it a program for purely human struggle and purely human labor. But for that, it had—and will have—to draw from the treasure-house of that life-joyful era of antiquity with its love of the earth, the body, and concrete reality, and to foster again the social instinct in its realistic form. Classical delight in living, plus the ceaseless drive to conquer, to grow. An unsated romantic idealism clad in the splendid forms of self-assured humanity. Goethe sketches such an ideal for us in the final speeches of Faust the Builder, Faust the public man. To make each person such a Faust, in the full richness of his inner nature—this is the task of philosophical and artistic self-education of humankind. Yet that task will not be accomplished before suitable conditions are created; triumphant socialism will bring them about.

Glancing back at the path behind us and preparing for further exposition of the religious evolution of the spirit, we can repeat the powerful lines of James Darmesteter: “Religion is not a revelation from heaven, but neither is it a fabrication by swindlers. It is the resolution of the formidable riddles posed by one’s environment. Man answers them, led by urgings from without and within. It is a dream upon the phantasmagorias of nature and the mysteries of humanity’s destiny.”

But is the new religion merely a dream? No—it is hope, a hope more solid than that of any other religion. Hope can, of course, yet deceive us. But let mankind fail to triumph, let it be doomed one day to die—still, the religion of labor shall help it live a fine life, and shall erase from the concept of religion in general the just accusation that, up to now, it has sold humanity its consolations at too dear a price. Religion is becoming rationalized, purified, yet it loses nothing of its depth, its solemn power, its thrilling beauty: in it, man beholds the purest reflection of his great species, recognizes that he is a great elemental being—Man—and gains from it heroic resolve, renouncing the self, mastering his own “I,” to battle in a centuries-long struggle for Man, despite the outcome’s being shrouded by the heavy mist of the future. Religion is enthusiasm—and “without enthusiasm, people cannot bring forth anything great.”

Footnotes

1. Not Aristophanes. ↩